ART-TYPE EDITION

SAPHO

By

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I

"Come, look at me. I like the color of your eyes. What's your name?"

"Jean."

"Just Jean?"

"Jean Gaussin."

"From the South, I can see that. How old are you?"

"Twenty-one."

"An artist?"

"No, madame."

"Ah! so much the better."

These brief sentences, almost unintelligible amid the shrieks and laughter and dance music of a masquerade party, were exchanged, one night in June, by a bagpiper and a female fellah in the conservatory of palms and tree-like ferns which formed the background of Déchelette's studio.

To the Egyptian's searching examination, the piper replied with the ingenuousness of his tender years, the recklessness and the sigh of relief of a Southerner who has been silent for a long while. A stranger to all that throng of painters and sculptors, lost sight of immediately after his arrival by the friend who had brought him, he had been sauntering about for two hours with his attractive fair face tanned and gilded by the sun, his curly

hair close and short as the sheepskin costume he wore; and a triumph, which he was far from suspecting, arose and whispered around him.

Dancers jostled him roughly with their shoulders, studio fags laughed and jeered at the bagpipe slung over his shoulder and his mountain costume, heavy and uncomfortable on that summer night. A Japanese woman, with eyes suggestive of the faubourg, her high chignon held in place by steel knives, hummed as she ogled him: *Ah! qu'il est beau, qu'il est beau, le postillon!* while a Spanish *novia,* passing on the arm of an Apache chief violently thrust her bouquet of white jasmine into his face.

He failed to understand these advances, imagined that he was cutting an exceedingly absurd figure, and took refuge in the cool shadows of the glass gallery, where a divan was placed against the wall under the plants. That woman had come at once, and taken a seat by his side.

Young, beautiful? He could not have told. From the long sheath of blue woolen stuff, in which her full figure swayed with an undulating motion, emerged two round and shapely arms bare to the shoulder; and her little hands laden with rings, her wide-open gray eyes increased in apparent size by the curious iron ornaments hanging from her forehead, formed a harmonious whole.

An actress without doubt. Many actresses came to Déchelette's; and the thought was not calculated to put him at his ease, as persons of that sort had great terror for him. She sat very near him, with her elbow on her

knee, her head resting on her hand, and spoke with grave sweetness, with a touch of weariness in her tone. "From the South, really? And such light hair! That's an extraordinary thing."

Then she wanted to know how long he had lived in Paris, if the examination for admission to the diplomatic service that he was preparing for was very hard, if he knew many people, and how he came to be at that party at Déchelette's on Rue de Rome, so far from his Latin quarter.

When he told her the name of the student who had brought him—"La Gournerie, a relative of the author—no doubt you know him"—the expression of the woman's face changed, suddenly darkened; but he did not notice, being of the age when eyes shine without seeing. La Gournerie had promised that his cousin would be there, that he would introduce him.

"I like his verses so much! I shall be so glad to know him!"

She smiled compassionately at his innocence, with a pretty drawing together of the shoulders, and at the same time put aside the light leaves of a bamboo with her hand, and looked into the ball room, to see if she could not discover this great man.

The festivity at that moment was as animated and resplendent as the transformation scene of a fairy spectacle. The studio—the hall rather, for little work was ever done there—extended to the roof, making one enormous room, and its light and airy summer draperies, its shades

of fine straw and gauze, its lacquered screens, its multi-colored glassware, and the cluster of yellow roses which embellished the opening of a high Renaissance fireplace, were illuminated by the variegated, bizarre reflections of innumerable Chinese, Persian, Moorish, and Japanese lanterns, some in perforated iron carved like the door of a mosque, others in colored paper shaped like different fruits, others like open fans, flowers, birds, and serpents; and flashes of electricity, of a bluish tinge, would suddenly pale all those thousands of lights, and cast a frosty gleam, like a ray of moonlight, on the faces and bare shoulders, on all the phantasmagoria of dresses, feathers, spangles, and ribbons, jostling one another in the ball room, and sitting in tiers on the Dutch staircase, with its massive rail leading to the galleries on the first floor, which were over-topped by the long necks of the double basses, and the frenzied flourishes of the conductor's baton.

From his seat the young man saw it all through a network of green branches, of flowering convolvuli, which blended with the decorations, formed a frame for them, and by an optical illusion, in the constant motion of the dance, threw wreaths of glycine on the silver train of a princess's gown, and placed a head-dress of dracæna leaves above a Pompadour shepherdess's pretty face; and the interest of the spectacle was doubled now for him by the pleasure of learning from his gypsy the names, all renowned, all well known, which were concealed beneath

those fancy costumes, so amusing in their variety and oddity.

That whipper-in, with his short whip slung saltire-wise, was Jadin; while that shabby country curé's cassock a little farther on disguised old Isabey, who had made himself taller by putting a pack of cards in his buckled shoes. Père Corot smiled from behind the huge visor of an Invalide's cap. She also pointed out Thomas Couture as a bull-dog, Jundt as a thief-catcher, Cham as a humming-bird.

Several serious historical costumes, a beplumed Murat, a Prince Eugene, a Charles I., worn by young painters, marked clearly the difference between the two generations of artists; the latest comers serious, cold, with faces of members of the Bourse prematurely aged by the characteristic wrinkles traced by absorbing financial preoccupation; the elders much more boyish, mischievous, noisy and frolicsome.

Despite his fifty-five years and the palm-leaves of the Institute, the sculptor Caoudal as a hussar in barracks, his bare arms exhibiting his herculean biceps, a painter's palette dangling against his long legs in guise of *sabretasche,* was dancing a *cavalier seul* of the time of the Grande Chaumière, opposite the musician de Potter, in the costume of a muezzin on a spree, his turban awry, imitating the *danse de ventre,* and whining "La Allah, il Allah!" in a terribly shrill voice.

Those frolicsome celebrities were surrounded by a

large circle, the dancers resting meanwhile; and in the front row stood Déchelette, the master of the house, wrinkling his little eyes, his Kalmuck nose, his grizzly beard, happy in the gayety of the others and highly entertained without seeming to be.

Déchelette, the engineer, a typical figure of artistic Paris ten or twelve years ago, very good-natured, very wealthy, with a taste for art, and that free-and-easy manner, that contempt for public opinion, which result from a life of travel and bachelorhood, had at that time a contract for a railroad from Tauris to Teheran; and every year, to recuperate after ten months of fatigue, of nights under canvas, of wild gallops across sandy deserts and swamps, he came to Paris to pass the very hot season in that house on Rue de Rome, built from his own plans and furnished like a summer palace, where he got together clever men and pretty girls, calling upon civilization to give him in a few weeks the essence of its most piquant and delicious products.

"Déchelette has arrived." The news spread through the studios as soon as the great linen shades which covered the glass front of the house were seen to rise like a stage-curtain. That meant that the fêtes were about to begin, and that they were to have two months of music and merry-making, of dancing and feasting, breaking in upon the silent torpor of Quartier de l'Europe at that season of villas and sea-baths.

Personally Déchelette took no part in the bacchanalian festivities that woke the echoes of his studio night and

day. That indefatigable rake brought to his pleasures a cold-blooded passion, a glance vague and smiling, as if deadened by hasheesh, but of imperturbable calmness and lucidity. An exceedingly loyal friend, giving bountifully without counting, he entertained for women the contempt of an Oriental, compounded of indulgence and courtesy; and of those who came there, attracted by his great wealth and the joyous eccentricity of the festivities, not one could boast of having been his mistress more than one day.

"A good fellow, all the same," added the gypsy, who gave Gaussin this information. Suddenly she interrupted herself,—

"There's your poet."

"Where?"

"In front of you, dressed as a village bridegroom."

The young man uttered an "Oh!" of disappointment. His poet! That fat, shiny, perspiring man, performing awkward antics in the false collar with two points and the flowered waistcoat of Jeannot. The despairing, piercing shrieks of the *Livre de l'Amour* came to his mind, the book that he never read without a quickening of the pulse; and instinctively he murmured aloud,—

"Pour animer le marbre orgueilleux de ton corps,
O Sapho, j'ai donné tout le sang de mes veines." [1]

She turned quickly, jangling her barbarian ornaments.

[1] To give life to the haughty marble of thy body,
O Sapho, I have given all the best blood in my veins.

"What's that you say?"

They were lines written by La Gournerie; he was surprised that she did not know them.

"I don't like poetry," she said shortly; and she remained standing, with a frown on her face, watching the dancing and nervously toying with the beautiful lilac clusters hanging before her. Then, with an effort, as if forcing herself to a painful decision, she said "Goodnight," and disappeared.

The poor piper was dumbfounded. "What's the matter with her? What did I say to her?" He cudgeled his brains, but could think of nothing, except that he would do well to go to bed. He picked up his bagpipes with a melancholy air, and returned to the ball room, less annoyed by the gypsy's departure than by the thought that he must pass through all that crowd to reach the door.

The consciousness of his own obscurity among so many celebrities made him still more timid. They were no longer dancing, except a few couples here and there clinging desperately to the last strains of a dying waltz; among them Caoudal, superb and gigantic, with head erect, whirling around with a little knitting-woman in his red arms, her hair flying in the wind.

Through the great windows at the rear, which was wide open, entered puffs of early morning air with the white light of dawn, rustling the leaves of the palms, prostrating the flames of the candles as if to extinguish them. A paper lantern took fire, bobèches burst, and all

around the room the servants were arranging small round tables as on the terraces of cafés. At Déchelette's the guests always supped thus, by fours and fives; and at that moment congenial spirits were seeking one another and forming groups.

There were shouts and fierce yells, the *"Pilouit"* of the faubourgs answering the *"You you you you,"* in imitation of a rattle, of the girls of the Orient; and conversations in undertones and the voluptuous laughter of women led away with a caress.

Gaussin was availing himself of the confusion to glide toward the outer door, when his student-friend, dripping with perspiration, his eyes like saucers, a bottle under each arm, stopped him: "Why, where in the deuce were you? I've been looking for you everywhere. I have a table and some girls, little Bachellery from the Bouffes—dressed as a Japanese, you know. She sent me to find you. Come quick!" and he ran off. The piper was thirsty; then the wild excitement of the ball tempted him, and the pretty face of the little actress, who was making signs to him in the distance. But a sweet voice murmured close to his ear,—

"Don't go there."

The woman who had just been sitting by him was close beside him now, leading him away; and he followed her unhesitatingly. Why? It was not because of her personal attraction; he had scarcely glanced at her, and the other over yonder, who was calling him, adjusting the

steel knives in her hair, pleased him much more. But he obeyed a will superior to his own, the headstrong violence of a desire.

"Do not go there."

Suddenly they both found themselves on the sidewalk on Rue de Rome. Cabs were waiting in the pale morning light. Street-sweepers, mechanics going to their work, glanced at that uproarious revel, overflowing into the street, that couple in fancy dress, a Mardi Gras in mid-summer.

"To your house or mine?" she asked. Without stopping to consider why, he thought that it would be better to go to his house, and gave his distant address to the driver. During the drive, which was long, they talked little. But she held one of his hands in hers, which he felt were small and cold; and except for that icy, nervous pressure, he might have thought that she was sleeping, as she lay back against the cushion with the wavering reflection of the blue curtain on her face.

The cab stopped on Rue Jacob in front of a student's lodging-house. Four flights of stairs to ascend; they were long and steep. "Shall I carry you?" he said with a laugh, but in an undertone, because of the sleeping house. She looked him over with a slow, contemptuous, yet tender glance,—the glance of experience, which gauged his strength and said plainly, "Poor little fellow!"

Thereupon, with a fine outburst of energy, characteristic of his age and his southern blood, he seized her and carried her like a child,—for he was a sturdy, strapping

youth for all his fair girlish skin,—and he went up the first flight at a breath, exulting in the weight suspended about his neck by two lovely, cool bare arms.

The second flight was longer, less pleasant. The woman hung more heavily as they ascended. Her iron pendants, which at first caressed him with a pleasant tickling sensation, sank slowly and painfully into his flesh.

At the third flight he panted like a piano-mover; his breath almost failed him, while she murmured ecstatically, "Oh! *m'ami,* how nice this is! how comfortable I am!" And the last stairs, which he climbed one by one, seemed to him to belong to a giant staircase, whose walls and rail and narrow windows twisted round and round in an interminable spiral. It was no longer a woman he was carrying, but something heavy, ghastly, which suffocated him, and which he was momentarily tempted to drop, to throw down angrily at the risk of crushing her brutally.

When they reached the narrow landing, "Already!" she exclaimed, and opened her eyes. He thought, "At last!" but could not have said it, for he was very pale, and held both hands to his breast, which seemed as if it would burst.

The ascent of those stairs in the melancholy grayness of the morning was an epitome of their whole history.

II

He kept her two days; then she went away, leaving behind her a memory of soft flesh and fine linen. He knew nothing of her but her name, her address, and these words: "When you want me, call me—I shall always be ready."

The little card, dainty and perfumed, read:

FANNY LEGRAND

6 Rue de l'Arcade

He stuck it in his mirror, between an invitation to the last ball at the Department of Foreign Affairs and the fanciful, illuminated programme of Déchelette's evening-party, his only two appearances in society of the year; and the memory of the woman, which hovered for several days around the fireplace in that faint, delicate perfume, faded away with it; nor was Gaussin, who was a serious, hard-working youth, especially distrustful of the temptations of Paris, conscious of an inclination to renew that *amourette* of a day.

The ministerial examination took place in November.

He had but three months to prepare for it. After that would come a probationary term of three or four years in the offices of the consular service; then he would be sent away somewhere, a long distance away. The idea of exile did not alarm him; for a tradition among the Gaussins d'Armandy, an old Avignon family, demanded that the oldest son should follow what is called *the career,* with the example, the encouragement, and the moral protection of those who had preceded him in it. In the view of that young provincial Paris was simply the first port in a very long voyage, which fact prevented him from forming any serious connection, either by way of love or friendship.

One evening, a week or two after the Déchelette ball, as Gaussin, having lighted his lamp and arranged his books on the table, was about to begin to work, some one knocked timidly; and when he opened the door, a woman appeared, dressed in a light and fashionable costume. He did not recognize her until she lifted her veil.

"You see, it's I. I have come back."

As she detected the anxious, annoyed glance he cast at the task awaiting him, she added,—

"Oh! I won't disturb you—I know what that is."

She removed her hat, took up a number of *Le Tour de Monde,* settled herself in a chair and did not stir, being apparently absorbed by what she was reading; but every time that he raised his eyes, he met her glance.

And in very truth, it required courage for him to refrain from taking her in his arms at once, for she was

very tempting and very charming, with her little face with its low forehead, short nose, sensual and kindly lip, and the mature suppleness of her figure in that dress, thoroughly Parisian in its faultless style, and less terrifying to him than her Egyptian costume.

She left him early the next morning, and returned several times during the week, always with the same pallor, the same cold, moist hands, the same voice trembling with emotion.

"Oh! I know perfectly well that I bore you," she would say to him, "that I tire you. I ought to be more proud. Would you believe it? Every morning, when I leave you, I swear that I will not come again; and then at night it seizes me again like an attack of insanity."

He gazed at her, amused, surprised, in his scorn of the woman, by that amorous persistence. The women he had known hitherto, met at beer-shops or skating-rinks, and, sometimes young and pretty, left behind them a feeling of disgust with their idiotic laughter, their cooks' hands, and with a certain vulgarity in their instincts and their speech which led him to open the window when they had gone. In his innocence, he fancied that all women of pleasure were of the same sort. So that he was amazed to find in Fanny a genuine womanly gentleness and reserve, with the superiority over the bourgeois women he was accustomed to meet in his mother's house in the province, due to a smattering of art, a familiarity with all sorts of subjects, which made their conversations varied and interesting.

And then she was musical, accompanied herself on the piano, and sang, in a somewhat worn and uneven but well-trained voice, romanzas by Chopin or Schumann, provincial ballads, airs of Berri, Bourguignon, or Picardie, of which she had an extensive repertory.

Gaussin, who was mad over music, that art of indolence and of the open air in which the people of his province take such pleasure, was spurred on by music in his working hours, and found it deliciously soothing in his moments of repose. And from Fanny's lips it was especially delightful to him. He was surprised that she was not engaged at any theatre, and learned that she had sung at the Lyrique. "But not for long; it was too much of a bore."

There was no suggestion about her of the studied, conventional manners of the stage-performer; not a shadow of vanity or of falseness. Simply a certain mystery concerning her life away from him, a mystery not divulged even in the hours of passion; nor did her lover try to solve it, being neither jealous nor inquisitive, allowing her to arrive at the stated time without even looking at the clock, ignorant as yet of the sensation of suspense, of those violent blows of the heart against the breast betokening desire and impatience.

From time to time, the weather being very fine that summer, they set out on voyages of discovery among the charming nooks in the outskirts of Paris, with which her acquaintance was most precise and thorough. They formed part of the noisy multitude at some suburban

railway station, breakfasted at a cabaret on the edge of a forest or lake, avoiding only certain too frequented spots. One day he suggested that they go to Vaux-de-Cernay. "No, no, not there; there are too many painters."

And he remembered that that antipathy of hers for artists had been the beginning of their love. When he asked her the reason for it, she said,—

"They are crazy, inexplicable creatures, who always tell more than they know. They have done me a great deal of harm."

"But," he protested, "art is a noble thing. There is nothing like it to embellish, broaden one's views of life."

"Ah! my dear, the noble thing is to be simple and upright as you are, to be twenty years old, and to love dearly."

Twenty years old! you would have said she was no more than that, to see her so full of life, always ready, laughing at everything, pleased with everything.

One evening they arrived at Saint-Clair in the valley of Chevreuse the night before a holiday, and could find no room. It was late, and they must pass through a league of forest in the dark to reach the next village. At last they were offered an unoccupied cot-bed at the end of a barn in which masons slept.

"Come on," she said with a laugh; "it will remind me of my days of poverty."

So she had known poverty!

They crept along, feeling their way between the occupied beds in the great roughly whitewashed apartment,

where a night light was smoking in a niche in the wall; and all night long, lying side by side, they smothered their kisses and their laughter, listening to the snoring, the groans of weariness of their room-mates, whose cotton caps and heavy working-shoes lay close beside the Parisian girl's silk dress and dainty boots.

At day-break a wicket opened in the lower part of the great door, a ray of white light touched lightly the bed-cords and the hard earth, while a hoarse voice shouted "Ohé! time to get up!" Then there ensued a slow, painful commotion in the barn, once more in darkness; yawnings, stretchings, hoarse coughs, the depressing sounds of a room full of human beings just aroused from sleep; and the Limousins went away one by one, heavily and in silence, having no suspicion that they had slept in close proximity to a lovely girl.

After they had gone, she rose, put on her dress by feeling, and hastily twisted up her hair. "Wait here, I will be back in a moment." She came back in a moment with an enormous armful of wild flowers dripping with dew. "Now let us go to sleep," she said, scattering over the bed the cool perfume of the early morning blossoms, which revivified the atmosphere about them. And she had never seemed so pretty to him as she did standing in the doorway of that barn, laughing in the morning light, with her light curls flying and her riotous nosegay.

Another time they breakfasted at Ville d'Avray, beside the pond. An autumn morning enveloped with mist the placid water and the ruddy foliage of the woods in front

of them; they were alone in the little garden of the restaurant, kissing as they ate their fish. Suddenly, from the rustic pavilion in the branches of the plane-tree at the foot of which their table stood, a loud, bantering voice called down to them, "I say, you people, when do you propose to be done with your billing and cooing?" And the lion's face and red mustache of the sculptor Caoudal peered through the opening of the little rustic chalet.

"I should very much like to come down and breakfast with you. I'm as bored as an owl here in my tree."

Fanny did not reply, being visibly annoyed by the meeting; Jean, on the other hand, accepted the suggestion instantly, for he was curious to see the famous artist and flattered to have him at his table.

Caoudal, very coquettishly attired in what seemed to be a *négligé* costume, although everything was carefully studied, from the cravat of white crêpe de Chine to enliven a complexion seared with wrinkles and pimples, to the jacket fitting tightly to the still slender figure and the swelling muscles—Caoudal looked older than at Déchelette's ball.

But what surprised and even embarrassed him a little was the intimate tone which the sculptor adopted with his mistress. He called her Fanny, addressed her in the most familiar way. "You know," he said, as he placed his plate on their table, "I have been a widower for a fortnight. Maria has gone off with Morateur. I didn't mind it at first. But this morning, when I went to the studio, I found I was as lazy as the deuce. Impossible to

work. So I left my group and came out to breakfast in the country. It's a wretched idea when one's alone. A little more and I should have cried into my stew."

He glanced at the Provençal, whose wavy beard and curly hair were of the color of the Sauterne in the glasses.

"Youth's a fine thing! No danger of any one leaving off loving her when she looks like that; right now she looks as young as he does."

"Saucy creature!" she exclaimed with a laugh; and her laughter rang with the fascination that knows no age, the youth of the woman who loves and wishes to be loved.

"Astonishing! astonishing!" muttered Caoudal, scrutinizing them both as he ate, with a contortion of melancholy and envy at the corners of his mouth. "I say, Fanny, do you remember a breakfast here—it was a long while ago, damme!—there was Ezane, Dejoie, the whole crowd, and you fell into the pond. We had dressed you up as a man, with the fish-warden's jacket. It was mightily becoming to you."

"Don't remember," she replied coldly and truthfully; for such changing, hap-hazard creatures never see aught but the present moment of their love. They have no memory of what has gone before, no fear of what may come after.

Caoudal, on the contrary, his mind dwelling on the past, punctuated with copious draughts of Sauterne the exploits of his lusty youth, in love and drinking, picnic parties, opera balls, professional achievements, battles, and conquests. But when he turned toward them with

the reflection of all the flames he had kindled gleaming in his eyes, he saw that they were not listening to him, but were picking grapes from each other's lips.

"How tiresome it must be to listen to what I'm telling you! Oh! yes, I am a terrible bore. Damme! It's a beastly thing to be old!"

He rose and threw down his napkin. "Charge the breakfast to me, Père Langlois," he shouted in the direction of the restaurant.

He walked sadly away, dragging his feet as if suffering from an incurable disease. For a long while the lovers looked after his tall figure stooping under the golden-hued leaves.

"Poor Caoudal! he certainly is getting heavy," murmured Fanny, in a tone of sweet compassion; and when Gaussin expressed his indignation that Maria, a harlot, a model, could find any amusement in the sufferings of a Caoudal and prefer to the great artist—whom?—Morateur, an obscure painter, of no talent, with nothing in his favor but his youth, she began to laugh, "Oh! you innocent! you innocent!" and throwing his head back on her knees with both hands, she buried her face in his eyes and hair as in a bouquet.

That evening Jean slept for the first time in his mistress's room, after she had tormented him to do it for three months:—

"Come, tell me—why you don't want to."

"I don't know—I don't like the idea."

"But I tell you that I am free, that I am alone."

Assisted by the fatigue of the excursion into the country, she succeeded in enticing him to Rue de l'Arcade, which was quite near the station. On the *entresol* of a plain, substantial house an old servant in a peasant's cap, with a sullen air, opened the door for them.

"This is Machaume. Good-evening, Machaume," said Fanny, throwing her arms around her neck. "This is he, you know, my beloved king; I have brought him to the house. Light everything at once, make the place beautiful."

Jean was left alone in a very small salon with low-arched windows hung with curtains of the same common blue silk with which the divans and several pieces of lacquered furniture were covered. On the walls were three or four landscapes, which lightened and enlivened the monotony of the hangings; all of them bore a dedication: "To Fanny Legrand," "To my dear Fanny."

On the mantel was a half-size copy in marble of Caoudal's Sapho, which is to be found everywhere in bronze, and which Gaussin had seen in his father's study in his childhood. By the light of the single candle which stood near the base, he detected in that work of art a resemblance, refined and rejuvenated as it were, to his mistress. The lines of the profile, the movement of the figure under the drapery, the tapering roundness of the arms wound about the knees, were familiar, well known to him; his eye gloated on them with the memory of more tender sensations.

Fanny, finding him in rapt contemplation before the

figure, said to him with an indifferent air: "There is a touch of me in it, isn't there? Caoudal's model looked like me." And she led him forthwith into her bedroom, where Machaume was sulkily laying two covers upon a small table; all the candles lighted, even those beside the mirror in the wardrobe door, a lovely wood fire, bright as a first flame, crackling under the spark-fenders,—the chamber of a woman dressing for a ball.

"I preferred to sup here," she said with a laugh.

Never had Jean seen such a daintily furnished room. The Louis XVI. silks, the light muslins of his mother's and sisters' rooms had nothing whatever in common with that downy, fluffy nest where the woodwork was hidden behind delicate satins, where the bed was simply a couch wider than the others, placed at the end of the room on white furs.

Delicious was that caressing touch of light, of warmth, of blue reflections prolonged in the bevelled mirrors, after their wandering through the fields, the shower they had encountered, the mud of the sunken roads in the fading light. But the one thing that prevented his enjoying that fortuitous luxury like a true provincial was the servant's ill-humor, the suspicious look with which she eyed him, so noticeably that Fanny dismissed her with a word: "Leave us, Machaume; we will wait on ourselves." And as the woman went out, slamming the door behind her, she added: "Don't take any notice of her; she's angry with me for loving you too well. She says that I am throwing away my life. These country people are so greedy!

Her cooking, by the way, is better than she is. Just taste this *terrine* of hare."

She cut the pie, poured out the champagne, forgot to help herself in order to watch him eat, at every movement throwing back to the shoulder the sleeves of an Algerian *gandoura,* of soft white wool, which she always wore in the house. She reminded him so of their first meeting at Déchelette's; and, crowded into the same chair, eating from the same plate, they talked of that evening.

"Oh! for my part," said she, "as soon as I saw you come in, I wanted you. I would have liked to seize you, to carry you off at once, so that the others shouldn't have you. Now tell me what you thought when you saw me?"

At first she had frightened him; then he had felt full of confidence, perfectly at home with her. "By the way," said he, "I never asked you why you got angry. Was it on account of those two lines of La Gournerie's?"

She frowned again, the same frown as at the ball, then said, with a toss of the head, "Nonsense! let us say no more about it." And with her arms around him, she continued: "The fact is that I was a little bit afraid, myself. I tried to escape, to recover myself, but I couldn't, and now I never can."

"Oh! never?"

"You will see!"

He contented himself with answering with the sceptical smile of his years, heedless of the passionate, almost threatening tone in which that "You will see!" was uttered. The pressure of her arms was so soft, so submissive;

he firmly believed that he had only to make a gesture to release himself.

But why release himself? He was so comfortable in the cosseting atmosphere of that voluptuous chamber, so deliciously benumbed by that caressing breath upon his drooping eyelids, heavy with sleep, closing upon fleeting visions of golden woods, meadows, dripping mill-wheels, their whole day of love in the country.

In the morning he was awakened abruptly by Machaume's voice shouting unceremoniously at the foot of the bed: "*He* is here; he wants to speak to you."

"What's that! he wants to speak to me? So I am no longer in my own house, it seems! And you allowed him to come in!"

In a rage, she leaped out of bed and rushed from the chamber, half naked, her night-dress open.

"Don't stir, my dear, I will come back."

But he did not wait, nor did he feel at ease until he too had risen and was fully dressed, his feet safely in his boots.

As he was putting on his clothes in the hermetically closed room, where the night-light still shone upon the confusion of the little supper, he heard the sounds of a terrific quarrel, muffled by the hangings of the salon. A man's voice, angry at first, then imploring, its outbursts ending in sobs, in helpless tears, alternated with another voice which he did not recognize at once, it was so harsh and hoarse, laden with hatred and with degrading words, reminding him of a dispute between prostitutes in a beer-shop.

All that amorous luxuriousness was marred by the incident, besmirched as if the silk were spattered with mud; and the woman, too, was degraded to the level of the others whom he had despised hitherto.

She returned to the room panting, twisting her dishevelled hair with a graceful gesture: "Is there anything so stupid as a man crying?" Then, seeing that he was up and dressed, she uttered an angry exclamation: "You have gotten up!—go back to bed—at once.—I say you shall." Then suddenly softened, embracing him with voice and gesture: "No, no!—don't go—you cannot go like this. In the first place, I am sure that you won't come back."

"Why, yes, I will. What makes you think so?"

"Swear that you're not angry, that you will come again. Ah! you see I know you."

He swore whatever she wanted, but would not return to bed, despite her entreaties, and her repeated assurances that she was in her own house, perfectly free as to her life and her acts. At last she seemed to be resigned to allowing him to go, and accompanied him as far as the door, with no trace about her of the female satyr in a frenzy, but very humble, trying to obtain forgiveness.

A long, clinging farewell caress detained them in the anteroom.

"Well, when shall it be?" she asked, her eyes buried in his.

He was about to reply, with a falsehood doubtless, in his haste to be gone, when a ring at the door-bell checked him. Machaume came out of her kitchen, but Fanny mo-

tioned to her: "No, do not open the door." And they stood there, all three, motionless, without speaking.

They heard a stifled groan, then the rustling of a letter being pushed under the door, the footsteps slowly descending the stairs.

"Didn't I tell you that I was free? Look!"

She handed her lover the letter which she had opened, —a poor, miserable love-letter, very cringing, very cowardly, scrawled in haste on a café table, in which the poor devil asked forgiveness for his madness of the morning, acknowledged that he had no right over her save such as she chose to accord him, begged her on his knees not to banish him irrevocably, promising to agree to anything, to be resigned to anything—but not to lose her, great God! not to lose her.

"Fancy!" she said with a wicked laugh; and that laugh finally closed to her the heart that she sought to win. Jean thought her cruel. He had not learned as yet that the woman who loves has no bowels of compassion save for her love; that all her active powers of charity, kindness, pity, devotion are absorbed for the benefit of one human being, a single one.

"You do very wrong to make sport of him. That letter is horribly pathetic and heartrending." And he added in a low voice, holding her hands: "Tell me, why do you turn him away?"

"I don't want him any more. I don't love him."

"But he was your lover. He provided this luxury in

which you live, in which you have always lived, which is necessary for your happiness."

"My dear," she said in her frank way, "when I didn't know you, I thought this was all very nice. Now it is a bore, a disgrace; my heart rises against it. Oh! I know you will tell me that you're not in earnest about it, that you don't love me. But I make that my business. I will force you to love me, whether you will or no."

He made no reply, agreed to meet her the next day, and made his escape, leaving a few louis for Machaume, the drainings of his student's purse, to pay for the *terrine*. So far as he was concerned it was all over. What right had he to bring confusion into that woman's existence, and what could he offer her in exchange for what she would lose through him?

He wrote her to that effect the same day, as gently, as sincerely as he could, but without telling her that he had felt that their liaison, that pleasant, attractive caprice, had suffered a violent and fatal blow when he heard, after his night of love, that betrayed lover's sobs alternating with her own sneering laughter and her laundress's oaths.

In that tall youth, whose heart was far away from Paris, in the midst of the Provençal moors, there was a touch of the paternal roughness and all the delicacy of feeling, all the nervous temperament of his mother, whom he resembled as closely as a portrait. And to defend him against the allurements of pleasure he had in addition the example of a brother of his father, whose dissipation and

wild career had half ruined the family and endangered the honor of the name.

Uncle Césaire! With just those two words and the domestic drama they recalled, one might demand from Jean sacrifices much more painful than that of this *amourette*, to which he had never attached great importance. However, it was harder to break than he had imagined.

Although formally dismissed, she returned again and again, undiscouraged by his refusals to see her, by the closed door, by his inexorable orders. "I have no self-esteem," she wrote him. She watched for him to go to the restaurant for his meals, waited for him in front of the café where he read the newspapers. And no tears, no scenes. If he were with other men she contented herself with following him, watching for the moment when he should be alone.

"Do you want to see me to-night? No? Some other time then." And she would go her way with the gentle resignation of the peddler strapping up his pack, leaving him remorseful for his cruelty and humiliated by the lie he stammered at every meeting. "The examination was close at hand—he had no time. After that, later, if she still cared." As a matter of fact, he intended, as soon as he had passed, to take a month's vacation in the South, expecting that she would forget him in that time.

Unfortunately, when the examination was over, Jean fell sick,—a severe inflammation of the throat, caught in a corridor at the department, which assumed serious proportions as the result of neglect. He knew no one in Paris

save a few students from his province, whom his engrossing liaison had estranged and scattered. Moreover, under the circumstances, something more than ordinary devotion was required, and the very first night Fanny Legrand established herself beside his bed and did not leave him for ten days, nursing him tirelessly, without fear or disgust, as deft as a professional nurse, with affectionate, coaxing ways, and sometimes, in his hours of fever, carrying him back to a serious illness of his childhood, so that he called her his aunt Divonne and said, "Thank you, Divonne," when he felt Fanny's hands on his burning forehead.

"It isn't Divonne, it's I—I am taking care of you."

She saved him from mercenary nursing, from fires stupidly allowed to go out, from draughts brewed in a concierge's lodge; and Jean was constantly surprised at the activity, the ingenuity, the nimbleness of those indolent, pleasure-loving hands. At night she slept two hours on the couch,—a boarding house couch, as soft as the plank bed of a police-station.

"Pray do you never go home, my poor Fanny?" he asked her one day. "I am better now. You must go and set Machaume's mind at rest."

She began to laugh. A fine time she was having, was Machaume, and all the house with her. They had sold everything, furniture, clothes, even the bedding. All she had left was the dress on her back, and a little fine linen saved by her maid. Now, if he turned her away, she would be in the gutter.

III

"This time I think I have found what we want. Rue d'Amsterdam, opposite the station. Three rooms and a great balcony. If you choose, we will go and look at it when you leave the office. It's high up, fifth floor—but you can carry me. That was so nice, do you remember?"

Highly amused by the memory, she clung to him, nestled against his neck, seeking the old place, her place.

Their life had become intolerable in their furnished lodgings, with all that the term implies, the chattering of girls in nets and old shoes on the stairways, the paper partitions behind which other households swarmed, the promiscuous mixing up of keys, candlesticks, and boots. Not to her, certainly; with Jean, the roof, the cellar, even the sewer would have made a satisfactory nesting-place for her. But the lover's refinement took offence at certain associations, to which, as a bachelor, he had given no thought. Those one-night households annoyed him, seemed to cast dishonor upon his own establishment, caused him something of the same sadness and disgust caused by the cage of monkeys at the Jardin des Plantes, mimicking all the gestures and expressions of human love. He was tired of the restaurant too, of having to go twice a day for his meals to Boulevard Saint-Michel, a great room crowded with students, pupils at the Beaux-

Arts, painters and architects, who, although they did not know him, had become familiar with his face during the year he had dined there.

He blushed, as he opened the door, to see all those eyes turned upon Fanny, and entered with the aggressive, embarrassed air characteristic of very young men accompanied by a woman; and he also was afraid of meeting one of the chiefs of his department, or some one from his province. Then there was the question of economy.

"How expensive this is!" she would say every time, running over the bill for the dinner, which she would carry away with her. "If we were housekeeping, I could run the house three days for that money."

"Well, what's to hinder us?" And they set about finding a suitable place.

That is the pitfall. Everybody falls into it, the best, the most honorable of men, by virtue of the instinct of neatness, the longing for a "home," instilled in them by early education and the genial warmth of the fireside.

The apartment on Rue d'Amsterdam was rented at once and voted delightful, despite its rooms *en enfilade,* of which the kitchen and living-room looked out on a damp backyard where odors of dishwater and chlorine arose from an English tavern, and the bedroom on the sloping, noisy street, shaken day and night by jolting vans and drays, cabs and omnibuses, by the shrill whistles of arriving and departing locomotives, all the uproar of the terminus of the Chemin de Fer de l'Ouest which displayed its glass roof of the color of muddy water directly

opposite. The great advantage of the location was the knowledge that the train was close at hand, and Saint-Cloud, Ville d'Avray, Saint-Germain, and all the verdure-clad stations on the banks of the Seine almost under their balcony. For they had a balcony, broad and commodious, which retained from the munificence of the former tenants a zinc tent painted to imitate striped canvas, dripping wet and melancholy enough under the pattering of the winter rains, but a very pleasant place to dine in in summer, in the fresh air, as in a mountain chalet.

They turned their attention to the matter of furniture. Jean having informed Aunt Divonne, who was the family steward as it were, of his project of keeping house, she sent him the necessary money; and her letter announced at the same time the speedy arrival of a wardrobe, a commode, and a large cane-seated easy-chair taken from the *Chambre du Vent*[1] for the behoof of the Parisian.

The chamber, which he saw in his mind's eye at the end of a corridor at Castelet, always unoccupied, the shutters closed and barred, the door secured with a bolt, was exposed by its position to the full fury of the mistral, which made its walls creak like a room in a lighthouse. It was used as a store-room for old cast-off articles, for what each generation relegated to the past to make room for new purchases.

Ah! if Divonne had known what strange siestas would be taken in the cane-seated chair, what India silk skirts and flounced pantalettes would fill the drawers of the Em-

[1] The Windy Chamber.

pire commode! But Gaussin's remorse on that account was swallowed up in the numberless little delights of the beginning of housekeeping. It was such fun, after the office, between daylight and dark, to set off arm-in-arm on a voyage of discovery, and to visit some street in the faubourg to select a dining-room outfit—the sideboard, the table, and six chairs—or cretonne curtains for the windows and the bed. He would accept anything with his eyes closed; but Fanny scrutinized for two, tried the chairs, experimented with the leaves of the table, showed herself an experienced shopper.

She knew the shops where they could buy at the cost of manufacture a complete kitchen equipment for a small family, the four iron saucepans, the fifth glazed for the morning chocolate; no copper, because it takes too long to clean. Six metal covers with soup spoons, and two dozen plates of English ware, strong and bright-colored, all counted and packed and ready for shipment, like a doll's tea-set. For sheets, napkins, toilet and table linen, she knew a dealer, the agent of a great factory at Roubaix, to whom they could pay so much a month; and as she was always watching the shop-windows, on the lookout for bankrupt sales, for the wreckage which Paris constantly washes ashore in its scum, she discovered on Boulevard Clinchy, at second hand, a magnificent bed, almost new, and large enough for the ogre's seven young women to sleep in a row.

He too tried his hand at making purchases as he returned from the office; but he knew nothing about it,

could not bear to say no or to leave a shop empty-handed. Going into a second-hand place to buy an old-fashioned oil-cruet which she had described to him, he brought away as a substitute for the article, which was already sold, a salon chandelier with glass pendants, which was quite useless to them, as they had no salon.

"We will put it in the veranda," said Fanny to console him.

And the pleasure of taking measurements, the discussions as to placing a piece of furniture; and the shouts, the wild laughter, the arms thrown up in despair, when they discovered that, despite all their precautions, despite the very complete list of indispensable purchases, something had been forgotten.

For instance, the sugar-grater. Fancy their starting to keep house without a sugar-grater!

Then, when everything was brought and put in place, the curtains hung, a wick in the new lamp, what a delightful evening was that first one in the new home, the careful scrutiny of the three rooms before going to bed, and how she laughed as she held the light while he locked the door; "Another turn; one more—lock it tight. Let us be sure that we're at home."

Thereupon began a new, delightful life. On leaving his work, he returned home at once, longing to be sitting by the fire in his slippers. And as he splashed through the dark streets, he imagined their warm, brightly lighted room, enlivened by its old provincial furniture, at which Fanny turned up her nose at first as rubbish, but which

had turned out to be very pretty antique pieces; especially the wardrobe, a Louis XVI. gem, with its painted panels, representing Provençal fêtes, shepherds in jackets of flowered stuff dancing to the flute and the tambourine. The presence of those antiquated articles, familiar to his eyes in his childhood, reminded him of his father's house and sanctified his new home, whose comforts he was still to enjoy.

In answer to his ring, Fanny appeared, neatly and coquettishly dressed, "on deck," as she said. Her dress of black woolen stuff, without ornament, but cut by a fashionable dressmaker's pattern,—the simplicity of a woman who has worn fine raiment,—her sleeves rolled up, and a great white apron; for she herself did their cooking, and simply had a charwoman for the heavy work which chaps the hands or injures their shape.

She was very clever at it, knew a multitude of receipts, dishes of the North and South, as varied as her repertory of popular ballads, which, when the dinner was at an end and the white apron hung behind the closed door of the kitchen, she sang to him in her worn but passionate contralto.

Below, the street roared, a rushing torrent. The cold rain pattered on the zinc of the veranda; and Gaussin, in his easy-chair, with his feet stretched out to the fire, watched the windows in the railway station opposite and the clerks stooping to write by the white light of great reflectors.

He was very comfortable; he allowed himself to be

coddled. In love? no; but grateful for the love with which she enveloped him, for that never-varying affection. How could he have deprived himself so long of that happiness, in the fear—at which he laughed now—of being bewitched, of assuming a yoke? Was not his life more respectable than when he used to go about recklessly from girl to girl?

There was no danger for the future. Three years hence, when he went away, the separation would come about naturally, without any shock. Fanny was forewarned; they talked about it together, as about death,—a distant but inevitable fatality. There remained the great grief of his people at home when they learned that he did not live alone; the wrath of his father, that man of rigid principles and so quick to act.

But how could they find out? Jean saw no one in Paris. His father, "the consul," as he was called at home, was detained in Provence the whole year by the superintendence of his very considerable estates, which he cultivated himself, and by his hard battles with the vines. His mother was helpless, could not step or move without assistance, and left to Divonne the management of the house and the care of the two little twin sisters, Marthe and Marie, whose unexpected double birth had taken away her strength and activity forever. As for Uncle Césaire, Divonne's husband, he was a great child who was not allowed to travel alone.

And now Fanny knew the whole family. When he received a letter from Castelet, at the foot of which the little

girls had written a few lines in their big handwriting with their little fingers, she read it over his shoulder, shared his emotion. Of her own previous existence he knew nothing, asked no questions. He had the attractive, unconscious egotism of his years, no jealousy, no anxiety. Full of his own life, he allowed it to overflow, though aloud, laid bare his heart, while the other remained mute.

Thus the days and weeks passed in a happy tranquillity disturbed for a moment by a circumstance which moved them deeply, but in different ways. She thought that she was *enceinte,* and told him of it with such delight that he could not fail to share it. But at heart he was afraid. A child, at his age! What would he do with it? Should he acknowledge it? And what a pledge between himself and that woman, what a complication in future!

Suddenly the chain became visible to him, heavy, cold, and riveted about his neck. He did not sleep at night, nor did she; and, lying side by side in their great bed, they dreamed, open-eyed, a thousand leagues apart.

Luckily that false alarm was not repeated, and they resumed their peaceful, delightfully secluded life. Then, when the winter had passed and the real sun had returned once more, their little abode became still more charming, enlarged by the balcony and the tent. At night they dined there beneath the sky tinged with green and streaked by the whistling flight of swallow.

The street sent up its hot puffs and all the sounds of the neighboring houses; but the slightest breath of fresh air was theirs, and they forgot themselves for hours, hand in

hand, conscious of nothing. Jean remembered similar nights on the banks of the Rhone, and dreamed of distant consulates in the very warm countries, of a ship's deck, leaving the harbor, where the breeze would have that same long breath which fluttered the curtain of the tent. And when an invisible caress upon his lips murmured, "Do you love me?" he always returned from very far away to answer, "Oh! yes, I love you."—That is what comes of taking them so young; they have too many things in their heads.

On the same balcony, separated from them by an iron railing garlanded with climbing flowers, another couple billed and cooed, M. and Madame Hettéma, husband and wife, very vulgar persons, whose kisses resounded like slaps on the face. They were wonderfully well-mated in age, in tastes, in heavy build, and it was touching to hear those two mature lovers singing in low tones, as they leaned on the balustrade, old-fashioned sentimental ditties:

> "Mais je l'entends qui soupire dans l'ombre;
> C'est un beau rêve, ah! laissez-moi dormir." [1]

They appealed to Fanny; she would have liked to know them. Sometimes indeed she and her neighbor exchanged a loving, happy woman's smile over the blackened railing; but the men, as always, were more distant, and they never spoke.

[1] But I hear him sighing in the darkness;
'Tis a lovely dream, ah! let me sleep.

Jean was returning home from Quai d'Orsay one afternoon when he heard some one call him by name at the corner of Rue Royale. It was a lovely day, bright and warm, and Paris was sunning itself at that corner of the boulevard, which has not its equal in the world at sunset on a fine day, about the hour for returning from the Bois.

"Sit down here, my handsome youngster, and have something to drink; it rejoices my eyes to look at you."

Two long arms had seized him and seated him under the awning of a café which encroached upon the sidewalk with its three rows of tables. He made no resistance, flattered to hear the throng of provincials, foreigners, striped jackets and round hats, whispering curiously the name of Caoudal.

The sculptor, sitting at a table in front of a glass of absinthe, which went well with his military figure and the rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honor, had beside him the engineer Déchelette, who had arrived the day before, always the same, sunburned and yellow, his prominent cheekbones crowding his good-natured little eyes, his nostrils greedily sniffing Paris. As soon as the young man was seated, Caoudal pointed to him with comic rage,—

"Isn't that a handsome animal? To think that I was that age once, and that my hair curled like that! Oh! youth, youth!"

"Still the same, eh?" said Déchelette, greeting his friend's tirade with a smile.

"Don't laugh, my dear fellow. All that I have, all that I

am,—medals, cross, the Institute, the palsy,—I would give for that hair, that sunlike complexion."

Then he turned again to Gaussin in his abrupt way.

"And Sapho, what have you done with her? We never see her now."

Jean stared at him, failing to understand.

"Aren't you with her now?" And in face of his evident bewilderment, Caoudal added impatiently: "Sapho, you know—Fanny Legrand—Ville d'Avray."

"Oh! that's all over, a long while ago."

How came that lie to his lips? From a sort of shame, of disgust, at hearing that name of Sapho applied to his mistress; the embarrassment of discussing her with other men; perhaps, too, a desire to learn things which they would not otherwise have told him.

"What's that? Sapho? Is she still on earth?" queried Déchelette absent-mindedly, absorbed by the intoxicating joy of seeing once more the steps of the Madeleine, the flower-market, the long line of the boulevards between two rows of green bouquets.

"Why, don't you remember her at your house last year? She was superb in her fellah's tunic. And the autumn morning when I found her breakfasting with this pretty boy at Langlois', you'd have said she was a bride of a fortnight."

"How old is she, anyway? Since the days when I used to know her—"

Caoudal raised his head to reckon. "How old? how old? Let me see, she was seventeen in 1853, when she posed for

my figure; now it's '73. So figure for yourself." Suddenly his eyes kindled. "Ah! if you had seen her twenty years ago—tall, slender, with arching lips and a high forehead. Her arms and shoulders were a little thin still, but that was all right for the rough cast of Sapho. And the woman, the mistress!—the capacity for pleasure there was in her, the fire in that stone, that harpsichord in which not a note was missing! 'The whole lyre!' as La Gournerie used to say."

Jean, very pale, asked, "Was he her lover too?"

"La Gournerie? I should say so; I suffered enough on that account. Four years we lived together as husband and wife; four years I brooded over her and drained myself dry to gratify all her whims,—singing teachers, piano teachers, riding teachers, and God knows what. And when I had cut and smoothed and polished her into a fine stone, after picking her up out of the gutter one night in front of the Bal Ragache, that dandified poetaster came and took her from my house, from the hospitable table at which he sat every Sunday!"

He breathed very hard, as if to blow away the old love-rancor which still vibrated in his voice; then resumed more calmly,—

"However, his sneaking conduct did him no good. Their three years together were a perfect hell. That poet with his wheedling ways was stingy, ugly, a perfect maniac. You should have seen how they used to decorate each other! When you went to their house you'd find her with a patch over her eye, or his face all marked with

claws. But the best thing was when he undertook to leave her. She clung to him like the itch, followed him about, burst in his door, and waited for him, lying across his door-mat. One night in mid-winter she stayed five hours in the street outside La Farcy's where the whole crowd was. A pitiful thing! But the elegiac poet remained implacable, and one day he resorted to the police to get rid of her. Ah! he's a fine fellow! And as a fitting conclusion, a final acknowledgment to that lovely girl who had given him the best of her youth, her intelligence, and her flesh, he emptied on her head a volume of spiteful, filthy verse, of imprecations and lamentations, the *Livre de l'Amour,* his best book."

Motionless, leaning back in his chair, Gaussin listened, drinking very slowly through a long straw the iced drink in front of him. Surely it was some poison that had been poured into the glass and was freezing him from the heart to the vitals.

He shivered despite the splendid weather, saw shadows going and coming in a vague mist, a watering-cart standing in front of the Madeleine, and carriages rolling in both directions over the soft earth, as silently as over a pavement of down. There was no sound in all Paris, nothing save what was said at that table. Now Déchelette was speaking; he was pouring out the poison.

"What an atrocious thing such ruptures are!" And his calm, mocking voice took on a tone of gentleness, of infinite pity. "You have lived together, slept side by side,

mingled your dreams for years. You have said everything, given everything to each other. You have adopted each other's habits, ways of acting and speaking, even each other's features. You are united from head to foot. In fact, you are husband and wife! Then suddenly you tear yourselves apart and separate. How is it done? How does any one muster courage to do it? For my part I never could. No; I might be deceived, insulted, besmirched with filth and ridicule, and if the woman should weep and say to me, 'Stay!' I wouldn't go. And that's why, when I take one, I never do it until dark. No to-morrow, as old France used to say—or else marriage. That is final and more decent."

"No to-morrow—no to-morrow. You say it very glibly. There are women whom a man doesn't keep just one night,—the one we're talking about, for instance."

"I didn't give her a minute's grace," said Déchelette, with a placid smile which seemed hideous to the poor lover.

"In that case you were not her style, or else— She's the kind of a girl who clings when she loves. She has a taste for domestic life. By the way, she's had poor luck in her housekeeping. She sets up with Dejoie, the novelist; he dies. She goes to Ezano, and he marries. After him came the handsome Flamant, the engraver, the ex-model—for she has always had a fancy for talent or beauty—and you know her horrible adventure—"

"What adventure?" asked Gaussin, in a choking voice;

and he began again upon his straw as he listened to the love drama which stirred Paris to its depths a few years ago.

The engraver was poor, mad over the woman; and for fear of being abandoned by her, he made counterfeit banknotes in order to maintain her in luxury. Discovered almost immediately and arrested with his mistress, he was sentenced to ten years' penal servitude, while she escaped with six months' detention at Saint-Lazare, her innocence being established.

And Caoudal reminded Déchelette—who had followed the prosecution—how pretty she was in her little Saint-Lazare cap, and plucky too, not whimpering, and loyal to her man to the end. And her reply to that old greenhorn of a judge, and the kiss she threw to Flamant over the gendarmes' chapeaux, calling to him in a voice to move the very stones: "Don't be discouraged, *m'ami*. The happy days will return, we will love each other still!" That experience had disgusted her a little with housekeeping, all the same.

"After that, starting out in *chic* society, she took lovers by the month or week, and never an artist. Oh! she's a little afraid of artists. I believe I was the only one that she continued to see. From time to time she used to come and smoke a cigarette at the studio. Then I passed months without hearing her name mentioned, until the day I found her breakfasting with this handsome child and eating grapes out of his mouth. I said to myself, 'Ah! my Sapho is at her old tricks.' "

Jean could listen to no more. He felt as if he were dying with all the poison he had absorbed. The shivering of a moment before was succeeded by a burning heat which scorched his breast, ascending to his buzzing head, which seemed on the point of bursting like white-hot sheet-iron. He crossed the street, staggering among the wheels. Drivers shouted at him. What was the matter with them, the imbeciles?

As he passed the Madeleine flower-market, he was annoyed by the odor of heliotrope, his mistress's favorite perfume. He quickened his pace to escape it, and thought aloud, in a heart-rending frenzy: "My mistress!—oh! yes, a fine mess of filth. Sapho, Sapho! To think that I have lived a year with such a creature!" He repeated the name fiercely, remembering that he had seen in the newspapers, among other sobriquets of harlots, in the grotesque Almanach de Gotha of gallantry, Sapho, Cora, Caro, Phryne, Jeanne de Poitiers, the Seal.

And with the five letters of her abominable name that woman's whole life passed before his eyes like refuse in a sewer.— Caoudal's studio, the fracases at La Gournerie's, the sentry duty at night in front of brothels or on the poet's door-mat. Then the handsome engraver, the counterfeiting, the assizes, and the little convict's cap that was so becoming to her, and the kiss she threw to her counterfeiter: "Don't be discouraged, *m'ami.*" *M'ami!* the same pet name, the same caress as for him! What a disgrace! Ah! but he proposed to make a clean sweep of those abominations. And still that smell of heliotrope pursued

him through a twilight of the same pale lilac as the tiny flower.

Suddenly he noticed that he was still pacing the market like the deck of a ship. He hurried away to Rue d'Amsterdam without pausing for breath, firmly determined to drive that woman out of doors, to throw her down the stairs without explanation, hurling her insulting name at her back. At the door he hesitated, reflected, walked a few steps farther on. She would cry out, sob! howl through the house her whole sidewalk vocabulary, as she did once before on Rue de l'Arcade.

Should he write to her?—yes, that was the idea; it was much better, to settle her account in four words, very savage words. He entered an English tavern, deserted and dismal under the gas which was just being lighted, seated himself at a sticky table near the only customer, a girl with a death's head, who was eating smoked salmon, without drinking. He ordered a pint of ale, did not touch it, and began a letter. But too many words rushed into his head, struggling to come out all at once, and the thick, clotted ink would write them as slowly as it chose.

He tore up two or three beginnings, and was going away at last without writing, when a full, greedy mouth at his elbow inquired timidly: "Aren't you drinking? May I?" He made an affirmative sign. The girl pounced upon the pewter, and emptied it with a fierce gulp which disclosed the poverty of the wretched creature, having just enough in her pocket to satisfy her hunger, but not to water it with a little beer. A feeling of compassion stole

over him and appeased him, enlightened him suddenly as to the miseries of a woman's life; and he began to reflect upon and judge his misfortune more humanely.

After all, she had not lied to him; and if he knew nothing of her life, it was simply because he had never cared about it. With what could he reproach her? Her time at Saint-Lazare? But she had been acquitted, and almost borne in triumph when she was discharged. What else was there? Other men before him? Did he not know it? What reason was it for being more disgusted with her, that the names of her lovers were well known, famous, that he might meet them, talk with them, see their pictures in the shop-windows? Should he attribute to her as a crime her having preferred such men?

And in the depths of his being there sprang to life an unworthy, unavowable pride in sharing her with those great artists, in saying to himself that they thought her beautiful. At his age one is never sure, one does not know. One loves woman and love; but eyes and experience are lacking, and the young lover who shows you his mistress's portrait craves a glance, a word of approbation to reassure him. Sapho's face seemed to him embellished, surrounded with a halo, since he knew that she had been sung by La Gournerie, immortalized in marble and bronze by Caoudal.

But, his fury suddenly resuming possession of him, he left the bench on the outer boulevard upon which he had flung himself in his meditation, amid the cries of children and the gossip of workmen's wives in the dusty June eve-

ning; and he began to walk again, to talk aloud, angrily. Very pretty the bronze cast of Sapho,—bronze made for sale, exhibited everywhere, as trite as a barrel-organ tune, as that name Sapho, which, by dint of being bandied about for centuries, has become incrusted with obscene legends concerning her primitive charm, and from being the name of a goddess has become the label of a disease. Great God! how sickening it all was!

He gave vent thus, calm and furious by turns, to that maelstrom of opposing ideas and sentiments. The boulevard became darker and more deserted. There was a stale, acrid odor in the hot air, and he recognized the gateway of the great cemetery whither he had come the preceding year with all the youth of the quarter to attend the dedication of a bust by Caoudal on the tomb of Dejoie, the novelist of the Latin Quarter and author of *Cenderinette*. Dejoie, Caoudal! How strangely those names sounded in his ears since two hours ago! And how false and mournful the story of the girl student and her little household seemed to him, now that he knew the pitiful secret beneath it, and had learned from Déchelette the horrible nickname given to those sidewalk marriages!

The dark shadows, made darker by the proximity of death, terrified him. He retraced his steps, brushing against blouses that prowled about as stealthy and silent as birds of night, and soiled skirts loitering at the doors of brothels whose dirty windows were illuminated by broad shafts of light as from a magic lantern, in which couples passed to and fro and embraced. What time was it? He

felt thoroughly exhausted, like a raw recruit at the end of a day's march; and of his benumbing pain, which had descended into his legs, naught remained but extreme weariness. Oh! to go to bed, to sleep. Then, when he awoke, he would say to the woman, coldly, without anger: "Come—I know who you are. It isn't your fault nor mine; but we cannot live together any longer. Let us part." And in order to avoid her persecution he would go and embrace his mother and sisters, throw off in the Rhone breezes, in the free and lifegiving mistral, the defilement and the terror of his ghastly dream.

She had gone to bed, tired of waiting, and was sleeping in the bright light of the lamp, a book open on the sheet in front of her. His entrance did not awaken her; and he stood beside her bed, gazing at her curiously as if she were a new woman, a stranger whom he had found there.

Lovely, oh! she was lovely; arms, throat, shoulders of a delicate amber, well formed, without spot or blemish. But in those reddened eyelids—perhaps it was the novel she was reading, perhaps the anxiety, the suspense—on those features relaxed in repose and no longer sustained by the fierce desire of the woman who is resolved to be loved, what weariness, what confessions! Her age, her history, her excesses, her caprices, her many marriages, and Saint-Lazare, the blows, the tears, the terror, all were visible, clearly displayed; and the violent rings of dissipation and sleepless nights and the curl of disgust on the drooping lower lip, as worn and fatigued as the curbstone of a well

to which the whole village goes to drink, and the inchoate puffing which prepares the flesh for the wrinkles of old age.

That treachery of sleep, the silence that enveloped the whole scene, was grand and awful; it was like a battlefield at night, with all the horrors that one sees and those that one divines from the vague movements of the shadows.

And suddenly the poor child was seized with an intense, a suffocating desire to weep.

IV

They had finished dinner, the windows were open, and the prolonged whistling of the swallows hailed the fading night. Jean was not speaking, but he was on the point of speaking, and of saying the same cruel things which had haunted him and with which he had tormented Fanny since his meeting with Caoudal. She, noticing his downcast eyes and the air of feigned indifference with which he approached new subjects, divined his purpose and anticipated it.

"Come, I know what you're going to say to me; spare us both, I beg you; one gets exhausted at last. As long as all that is dead and gone, as I love only you, as you are the only man in the world to me—"

"If all that past were dead and gone, as you say," and he looked into the depths of her lovely eyes, of a quivering gray that changed with every new impression, "you would not keep the things that remind you of it; yes, up there in the cupboard."

The gray became a velvety black.

"You know, then?"

All that medley of love letters, portraits, those glorious archives of gallantry saved from so many catastrophes, she must at last make up her mind to destroy!

"You will at least believe me afterward?"

And as he replied with an incredulous smile of suspicion, she ran to fetch the lacquer casket with the carved iron work, lying among the piles of fine linen, which had puzzled her lover for some days.

"Burn them; tear them up; they are yours."

But he did not hurry to turn the little key, gazing at the cherry-trees with pink pearl fruit, and the flying storks carved on the lid, which he at last broke open without ceremony. Colored paper of all sizes and covered with all kinds of writing, with designs in gilt at the top, old yellow letters broken at the folds, pencil scrawls on leaves from note-books, visiting-cards in heaps, with no semblance of order, as in a drawer often searched and tossed about, into which he himself now plunged his trembling hands.

"Give them to me. I will burn them before your eyes."

She spoke feverishly, crouching before the fireplace, a lighted candle on the floor by her side.

"Give them to me."

But he replied, "No—wait," and added in a lower tone, as if ashamed, "I would like to read them."

"What for? You will only make yourself still more unhappy."

She thought solely of his sufferings, and not of the indelicacy of thus laying bare the secrets of passion, the confessions made on the pillow of all those men who had loved her; drawing near to him, still on her knees, she read with him, watching him out of the corner of her eye.

Ten pages, signed La Gournerie, 1861, in a long, feline handwriting, in which the poet, who had been sent to

Algeria to prepare an official and at the same time poetical account of the journey of the emperor and empress, gave his mistress a dazzling description of the festivities.

Algiers, overflowing with swarming thousands, a genuine Bagdad of the Thousand and One Nights; all Africa heaped up around the city, beating at its gates as if it would break them down, like a simoom. Caravans of negroes and camels laden with gum, tents of skins, an odor of human musk hovering over all that monkeyish multitude, camping on the seashore, dancing at night around great fires, making way respectfully every morning for the chiefs from the South, who arrived, like Magian kings, with oriental pomp, discordant music, reed flutes, hoarse little drums, the *goum*[1] surrounding the tricolored standard of the Prophet; and behind, led by negroes, the horses intended as a present to the *Emperour,* caparisoned in silk and silver with a jingling of bells and chains at every step.

The poet's genius made the scene very lifelike and vivid; the words gleamed on the page, like unmounted stones which jewelers examine on paper. Truly the woman at whose feet such treasures were cast might be well proud. Surely he must have loved her, for, notwithstanding the interest aroused by the singularity of the festivities, the poet thought only of her, was dying for a sight of her.

"Oh! last night I was with you on the great divan at

[1] An Arabian word, used in connection with the French army in Algiers to denote the contingent of troops furnished by each native tribe.

Rue de l'Arcade. You were wild with ecstasy under my caresses; then I abruptly awoke rolled in a rug on my terrace under the starry sky. The cry of the muezzin ascended from a neighboring minaret, in a clear and limpid outpouring of sounds, voluptuous rather than prayerful, and it seemed to be your voice that I heard as I emerged from my dream."

What evil power impelled him to continue his reading despite the horrible jealousy that whitened his lips, contracted his hands? Gently, coaxingly, Fanny tried to take the letter from him; but he read it to the end, and after it another, then another, letting them fall one by one with a gesture of contempt and indifference, without looking at the flame in the fireplace feeding on the great poet's impassioned lyrical effusions. And sometimes, in the overflow of that passion, exaggerated by the tropical temperature, the lover's poetic flight were sullied by some vile mess-room obscenity which would have surprised and scandalized the fair readers of the *Livre de l'Amour,* whose spirituality was as refined and spotless as the Jungfrau's silvery peak.

To what depths of baseness the heart will stoop! Jean dwelt longest upon those passages, those blots upon the page, with no suspicion of the nervous spasm that distorted his features each time. He even had the courage to emit a sneering laugh at this postscript, following a vivid description of a fête at Aïssaouas: "I have read my letter over; there are some things in it that really are not

bad; put it aside for me, I may be able to make some use of it."

"A gentleman who threw away no chances!" he exclaimed as he passed to another letter in the same hand, wherein, in the frigid tone of a man of business, La Gournerie demanded the return of a collection of Arabian ballads and a pair of Turkish slippers made of rice-straw. That was the liquidation of their liaison. Ah! he had known how to leave her; he was clever, that fellow!

And Jean, without pausing, continued to drain that bog, from which a hot, unhealthy vapor arose. When it grew dark he placed the candle on a table and ran through a multitude of short notes, almost illegible, as if written with a bodkin by fingers which were too large for it, and which, every moment or two, in an outburst of desire or of anger, gashed and tore the paper. The early days of her liaison with Caoudal, assignations, suppers, parties in the country; and altercations, importunate repentance, shrieks, base, degrading billingsgate, abruptly interlarded with amusing laughable sallies, sobbing reproaches, a revelation of all the great artist's weakness when face to face with separation and desertion.

The fire seized upon it and licked it with long red tongues in which the flesh and blood and tears of a man of genius smoked and crackled; but what mattered that to Fanny, whose whole heart now belonged to the young lover whom she was watching, whose burning fever scorched her through their clothing? He had found a pen

portrait signed Gavarni, with this dedication: "To my friend Fanny Legrand, in an inn at Dampierre, one rainy day." An intelligent, sorrowful face, with hollow eyes, an expression of bitterness, and despair.

"Who is that?"

"André Dejoie. I prized it because of the signature."

He said, "Keep it, I have no objection;" but in such a constrained, unhappy tone that she took the sketch, tore it in pieces, and threw it into the fire, while he plunged into the novelist's correspondence, a heartrending succession of letters, dated at winter seashore resorts, at watering-places, in which the writer, sent thither for his health, cried out in despair at his mental and physical distress, cudgeling his brain to find an idea at that distance from Paris, and mingled with requests for potions and prescriptions, with anxieties concerning money or business, advices of the forwarding of proofs, of renewals of notes, and always the same cry of despair and adoration addressed to Sapho's lovely body, which was prohibited by his physicians.

"In God's name, what was the matter with them all that they were mad after you like that?" muttered Jean, distracted but outspoken.

To him that was the only thought suggested by those despairing letters, avowing the utter upheaval of one of those glorious existences which young men envy and of which romantic women dream. What was the matter with them all? What did she give them to drink? He experi-

enced the horrible agony of a man who, being bound and helpless, should see the woman he loved outraged before his eyes; and yet he could not make up his mind to empty the box at one stroke, with his eyes closed.

Now it was the turn of the engraver, who, wretchedly poor and obscure as he was, with no other celebrity than that afforded by the *Gazette des Tribunaux,* owed his place in the reliquary solely to the great love she had had for him. Very degrading were those letters from Mazas, and stupid, clumsy, sentimental, like those of a soldier to his country sweetheart. But beneath the romantic commonplaces one was conscious of an accent of sincerity in his passion, a respect for the woman, a forgetfulness of self which distinguished him from the others; for instance, when he asked Fanny's pardon for the crime of loving her too dearly, or when, from the waiting-room at the Palais de Justice, immediately after his conviction, he told his mistress of his joy to know that she was acquitted and free. He complained of nothing. Thanks to her, he had had two years of such perfect, profound happiness with her that the memory of it would suffice to fill his life with joy, to mitigate the horror of his lot; and he ended by asking a favor,—

"You know that I have a child in the provinces whose mother died a long while ago; he lives with an old aunt, in such an out-of-the-way corner that they will never hear of my trouble. I have sent them what money I had left, saying that I was going on a long journey, and I rely on

you, my dear Nini, to inquire about the poor little fellow from time to time and let me know about him."

Fanny's interest was demonstrated by another letter, of quite recent date, hardly six months old: "Oh! you were good to come. How lovely you were! How sweet you smelt beside my convict's jacket, which made me so ashamed—"

"So you have continued to see him?" demanded Jean fiercely, interrupting his reading.

"At long intervals, as an act of charity."

"Even since we have been together?"

"Yes, once, only once, in the visitors' room; nobody can see them anywhere else."

"Ah! you're a fine girl!"

The thought that, notwithstanding their liaison she had visited that counterfeiter, exasperated him more than all the rest. He was too proud to say so.

But a package of letters, the last, tied with a blue ribbon and written in a fine, sloping hand, a woman's hand, unchained all his wrath.

"I change my tunic after the chariot race—come to my dressing-room."

"No, no—don't read that."

She threw herself upon him, snatched away the whole package and threw it into the fire; nor did he understand at first, even when he saw her at his knees, her face flushed by the reflection of the fire and the shame of her confession.

"I was young: it was Caoudal, the great fool. I did what he wanted."

Not till then did he understand, and he turned pale as death.

"Oh! yes— Sapho—'the whole lyre.' " And pushing her away with his foot, like an unclean beast, he added: "Leave me! Don't touch me! You make me sick!"

Her shriek was drowned by a terrible peal of thunder, very near and prolonged, at the same instant that a vivid flash illuminated the room. Fire! She sprang to her feet in terror, instinctively seized the carafe that stood on the table and emptied it on the mass of papers which had set fire to the winter's soot; then the watering-pot and the pitchers; and seeing that she was helpless, that the flames were shooting out into the room, she ran to the balcony, crying, "Fire! fire!"

The Hettémas arrived first, then the concierge and the police.

"Lower the fire-board!" they cried; "go up on the roof! Water! water! No, a blanket!"

They gazed in dismay at their invaded, bedraggled home; and when the alarm was at an end, and the fire extinguished, when the black crowd under the gas-lights in the street below had dispersed, and their neighbors had returned to their own apartment with their minds at ease, the two lovers, left amid that chaos of water, muddy soot, overturned, drenched furniture, felt sick at heart and cowardly, without strength to renew their quarrel or

to put the room in order. Something ominous and degrading had entered their life; and that night, forgetting their former repugnance, they slept at the lodging-house.

Fanny's sacrifice was destined to be of no avail. Of those burned, vanished letters, whole passages which he knew by heart haunted the lover's memory, rose to his cheeks in waves of blood, like certain passages in unclean books. And those former lovers of his mistress were almost all famous men. The dead survived; the portraits and names of the living were seen everywhere; people talked of them before him, and every time he had a feeling of oppression as of a family tie painfully severed.

As his trouble sharpened his wits and his eyes, he soon began to detect in Fanny the marks of early influences, and the expressions, the ideas, the habits which she had retained. That fashion of putting out the thumb as if she were shaping, moulding the object of which she was speaking, with a "You can see it from here," belonged to the sculptor. From Dejoie she had borrowed the mania for long words, and the popular ballads of which he had published a collection famous in every corner of France; from La Gournerie, his haughty, contemptuous tone and his severe judgments concerning modern literature.

She had assimilated it all, heaping incongruity upon incongruity, by the same phenomenon of stratification which makes it possible to ascertain the age and revolutions of the earth at its different geological periods; and perhaps she was not so intelligent as she had seemed to

him at first. But intelligence was of small consequence; though she had been the stupidest of women, vulgar, and ten years older than she really was, she would have held him by the power of her past, by that base jealousy which gnawed his vitals; and he no longer imposed silence upon its irritation or its rancorous hatred, but burst out on every occasion against one or the other of her lovers.

There was no sale for Dejoie's novels; any one of them could be bought on the quay for twenty-five centimes. And to think of that old fool of a Caoudal persisting in making love at his age! "He hasn't any teeth, you know; I watched him at that breakfast at Ville d'Avray. He eats in the front of his mouth, like a goat." His talent was all gone too. What a dead failure his *Female Faun* was at the last Salon! That "it was no good," was an expression which he got from her, and which she herself retained from her intimacy with the sculptor. When he attacked in that way one of his past rivals, Fanny chimed in with him; and you should have heard that youngster, ignorant of art, of life, of everything, and that superficial girl, who had rubbed off a little wit in her contact with those famous artists, pass judgment on them from a superior level, and condemn them oracularly.

But Gaussin's special antipathy was Flamant the engraver. Of him he knew nothing save that he was handsome, as fair of complexion as himself, that she called him *"m'ami,"* that she went to see him in prison, and that, when he attacked him as he did the others, calling him the "Sentimental Convict," or the "Pretty Recluse,"

Fanny turned her face away without a word. Erelong he accused his mistress of retaining a fond feeling for that brigand, and she was forced to explain herself, gently but with decision.

"You know perfectly well that I no longer love him, Jean, since I love you. I don't go there now, I don't answer his letters; but you will never make me speak ill of the man who loved me to madness, to crime." At that frank avowal, voicing the best sentiment that she possessed, Jean did not protest, but he was devoured by a jealous hatred, sharpened by distrust, which led him to return sometimes to Rue d'Amsterdam unexpectedly at midday. "Suppose she had gone to see him!"

He always found her at home, sitting idle in their little apartment, like an Oriental, or else at the piano giving a lesson in singing to their stout neighbor, Madame Hettéma. They had formed an intimacy since that night of the fire with those good people, placid and plethoric souls who lived in a perpetual current of fresh air, with doors and windows open.

The husband, a draughtsman at the Artillery Museum, brought his work home with him, and every evening in the week and all day Sunday he could be seen leaning over his great table, in his shirt-sleeves, puffing and perspiring, waving his hands to make the air circulate, with his beard almost to his eyes. His stout wife, sitting beside him in a dressing-sack, also melted with the heat, although she never did anything; and at intervals they

would strike up one of their favorite duets to cool their blood.

The two households were soon on an intimate footing. About ten in the morning Hettéma's loud voice would be heard at the door: "Are you there, Gaussin?" And as their departments lay in the same direction, they kept each other company. The draughtsman—a heavy, vulgar creature, several rungs lower on the social ladder than his young companion—said but little, talked as thick as if he had as much beard in his mouth as on his cheeks; but you felt that he was an honest fellow, and Jean's moral disorganization needed just such an association. He clung to it especially because of his mistress, who was living in a solitude peopled with memories and regrets more dangerous, perhaps, than the connections she had voluntarily renounced, and who found in Madame Hettéma, constantly engrossed with her man's welfare, with the toothsome surprise she was preparing for his dinner, and with the new air she would sing to him at dessert, a welcome and wholesome acquaintance.

But when the friendship proceeded so far as an exchange of invitations, he had scruples. Those people doubtless believed that they were married, his conscience refused to prolong the deception, and he told Fanny to tell her friend, so that there might be no misunderstanding. That made her laugh heartily. Poor *bébé!* no one was ever so innocent as he. "Why, they have never for one moment believed that we were married. And little they

care about it! If you knew where he went to get his wife. All that I ever did was worthy of Saint-Jean in comparison. He married her only so that he might have her all to himself, and the past troubles him very little, you see."

He could not believe it. An ex-prostitute, that good old soul, with the bright eyes, the childlike smile on her soft, fat face, the drawling provincialisms, for whom romanzas were never sentimental enough, nor language too distinguished; and he, the man, so placid, so secure in his amorous well-being! He watched him as he walked at his side, with his pipe between his teeth, with little sighs of beatitude, while he himself was always deep in thought, devouring himself with impotent rage.

"You will get over it, *m'ami,*" Fanny would say gently in the hours when they told each other everything; and she would soothe him, as affectionate and charming as on the first day, but with the addition of a sort of recklessness which Jean could not define.

It was her freer manner, her fashion of expressing herself, a consciousness of her own power, strange confidences, for which he did not ask, concerning her past life, her dissipation, the wild peaks of her curiosity. She no longer abstained from smoking, rolling in her fingers the everlasting cigarette which shortens the day for women of her sort, and leaving it about on all the furniture; and in their discussions she put forth the most cynical theories concerning life in general, the infamy of men, the roguery of women. Even the expression of her eyes changed, made

heavy by a vapor as of sleeping water through which flashed the lightning of a wanton laugh.

And the private manifestations of their passion likewise underwent a transformation. Reserved at the outset on account of the youth of her lover, whose first illusion she respected, the woman threw off all restraint after she had seen of her abandoned past the effect upon that child, when it was suddenly disclosed to him, and the swamp fever she had kindled in his blood. And she gave free rein to the diabolical caresses she had so long held in check, to all the delirious words her clenched teeth had arrested, displayed herself without reserve in all the pleniture of her charms as an amorous, accomplished courtesan, in all the horrible glory of Sapho.

Modesty, reserve, of what use were they? Men are all alike; crazy after vice and corruption,—that little fellow, like the rest. To tempt them with what they love is the best way to retain one's hold on them. And all that she knew, all the forms of depravity in pleasure with which she had been inoculated, Jean learned in his turn, to pass them on to others. Thus the poison circulates, propagates itself, consuming body and soul, like those torches of which the Latin poet speaks, which ran from hand to hand through the circus.

V

In their bedroom, beside a fine portrait of Fanny by James Tissot, a relic of her pristine splendor, there was a Southern landscape, all in black and white, roughly represented in the sunlight by a country photographer.

A stony hillside with terraces of vines supported by stone walls, and higher up, sheltered from the north wind by rows of cypresses and nestling against a small forest of pines and myrtles on which the sun shone brightly, was the great white house, half farm-house, half château, with a broad stoop, Italian roof, escutcheoned doors, and beyond, the red walls of the Provençal *mas,* the perches for the peacocks, the crib for the cattle, and the open sheds with ploughshares and harrows gleaming in their dark depths. The ruins of ancient fortifications, an enormous tower outlined against the cloudless sky, overlooked the whole, with a few roofs and the Roman church tower of Châteauneuf-des-Papes, where the Gaussins d'Armandy had dwelt for all time.

The domain of Castelet, vineyard and farm, rich in its vines, which were as famous as those of La Nerte and L'Ermitage, was transmitted from father to son, held in common by all the children, but always worked by the younger son, in accordance with the family tradition that required the eldest son to enter the consular service. Un-

luckily nature often interferes with such arrangements; and if ever there was a human being incapable of managing a farm, of managing anything under heaven, it was Césaire Gaussin, upon whom that heavy responsibility fell when he was twenty-four years of age.

A libertine, a haunter of village gambling-hells and brothels, Césaire, or rather *Le Fénat*,—the good-for-naught, the bad boy,—to give him his youthful sobriquet, was an exaggerated specimen of the incongruous type which appears from time to time in the most austere families, like a sort of safety-valve.

And after a few years of neglect, of idiotic waste, of disastrous games of *bouillotte* at the clubs of Avignon and Orange, the estate was mortgaged, the reserve cellars drained dry, the growing crops sold in advance; and one day, on the eve of the final levy, Le Fénat imitated his brother's signature, and drew three drafts payable at the consulate at Shanghai, feeling assured that he could procure the money to take them up before they matured; but they were presented to the elder brother in due course, with a desperate letter confessing th ruin of the family and the forgeries. The consul hastened to Châteauneuf, remedied the desperate condition of affairs by the aid of his savings and his wife's dowry, and, realizing Le Fénat's incapacity, he renounced the "career," although it was opening brilliantly before him, and became a simple vine-grower.

A true Gaussin he, in whom adherence to tradition was a mania, alternately violent and calm, like an extinct vol-

cano with a remnant of eruptive power in reserve, threatening at times to break out; hard-working withal, and an exceedingly well-informed agriculturist. Thanks to him, Castelet prospered, extended its boundaries to include all the property as far as the Rhone, and, as human chances and mischances never come singly, little Jean made his appearance under the myrtles of the homestead. Meanwhile Le Fénat wandered about the house, crushed under the weight of his wrongdoing, hardly daring to look at his brother, whose contemptuous silence overwhelmed him; he breathed freely only in the fields, hunting or fishing, tiring out his disappointment by trifling tasks, picking snails from the vines, cutting superb canes of myrtle or reed, and breakfasting alone out-of-doors on a *brochette* of little birds, which he cooked over a fire of olive-branches in the middle of the pasture. Returning at night to dine at his brother's table, he did not speak a word, notwithstanding his sister-in-law's indulgent smile, for she pitied the poor creature and supplied him with pocket-money, unknown to her husband, who dealt sternly with Le Fénat, less on account of his past follies than on account of those still to come; and in truth, the great catastrophe was no sooner repaired than the elder Gaussin's pride was subjected to a new test.

Three times a week, a pretty fisher-girl came to Castelet to sew,—Divonne Abrieu, born in the osier-bed on the bank of the Rhone, a genuine river-plant, with a long, undulating stalk. In her Catalan cap of three pieces fitting tightly to her little head, the ribbons thrown back and

disclosing the curve of the neck, slightly tanned like the face, down to the delicate snow-white lines of the breast and shoulders, she made one think of some *donna* of the old courts of love held all around Châteauneuf, at Courthezon, at Vacquerias, in the old donjons whose ruins are crumbling away on the hillsides.

That historical suggestion had nothing to do with Césaire's love, for he was a simple soul, devoid of imagination, and unread; but, being short in stature, he liked tall women, and was caught the first day. He was an expert, was Le Fénat, in village intrigues; a contradance at the ball on Sundays, a present of game, and afterwards the meeting in the fields. He found that Divonne did not dance, that she herself brought game to the kitchen, and that, being as strong and firm on her legs as one of the flexible white poplars on the river-bank, she was able to hurl the seducer headlong ten feet away. After that she kept him at a distance with the points of her scissors, which hung at her belt by a steel chain, and drove him mad with love, so that he talked of marrying her and confided in his sister-in-law. She, having known Divonne Abrieu from childhood, and knowing her to be virtuous and refined, thought in her inmost heart that that mésalliance would perhaps be Le Fénat's salvation; but the consul's pride rebelled at the idea of a Gaussin d'Armandy marrying a peasant: "If Césaire does that, I will never see him again." And he kept his word.

Césaire married, left Castelet, and went to live with his wife's relations on the bank of the Rhone, on a small al-

lowance which his brother made him and which his indulgent sister-in-law carried to him every month. Little Jean accompanied his mother on her visits, taking the keenest delight in the cabin of the Abrieus, a round smoke-begrimed structure, shaken by the tramontane or the mistral, and supported by a single, vertical timber like a mast. The open doorway formed a frame for the little jetty where the nets lay drying, with the silvery, pearly scales gleaming and sparkling among the meshes; below lay two or three great fishing-boats, tossing and straining at their cables, and the broad joyous river, aglow with light, splashing against its islands in pale green masses. And Jean, when he was very young, acquired there his fondness for long journeys, and for the sea which he had never seen.

Uncle Césaire's exile lasted two or three years; it might never have ended except for a momentous event in the family, the birth of the two little twins, Marie and Marthe. The mother fell sick as a result of that double birth, and Césaire and his wife were granted permission to go and see her. The visit was followed by a reconciliation between the two brothers, illogical, instinctive, due to the irresistible power of community of blood; Césaire and his wife took up their abode at Castelet, and as the poor mother was completely disabled by incurable anæmia, soon complicated by rheumatic gout, it fell to Divonne to keep the house, to superintend the rearing of the little girls, to take charge of the numerous staff of servants, and to go twice a week to see Jean at his school

at Avignon, to say nothing of the nursing of her invalid, who required her constant attention.

Being a woman of orderly instincts and clear-headed, she made up for her lack of education by her intelligence, her peasant's shrewdness, and the stray bits of learning that had remained in the brain of Le Fénat, now thoroughly tamed and disciplined. The consul relied upon her to overlook all the outlay for household expenses, which were very heavy with the increased burdens and the constantly diminishing revenues, sapped at the foot of the vines by the phylloxera. All the outlying fields suffered, but the home farm was still free from the pest; and the consul was constantly preoccupied by his endeavors to save the home farm by investigation and experiment.

This Divonne Abrieu, who clung to her peasant cap and her artisan's steel chain, and performed so modestly her duties as housekeeper and companion, kept the family out of financial difficulty in those critical years; the invalid was always supplied with the same costly luxuries; the little girls were reared beside their mother, like young ladies, and Jean's allowance regularly paid, first at the boarding-school, then at Aix, where he studied law, and finally at Paris, whither he had gone to finish his course. By what miracles of orderly management, of vigilance, she succeeded in accomplishing so much, they were all as ignorant as she. But whenever Jean thought of Castelet, whenever he raised his eyes to the photograph with its pale tones faded by the light, the first face that it recalled, the first name that he uttered, was Divonne's, the great-

hearted peasant woman who, he felt, was hidden behind the house of his fathers, holding it erect by the force of her will. For some days, however, since he had known what his mistress was, he had avoided pronouncing that revered name before her, as well as his mother's and those of all his family; it even annoyed him to look at the photograph, it was so out of place, so lost, on that wall above Sapho's bed!

One day, on returning home to dinner, he was surprised to find three covers laid instead of two, and even more surprised to find Fanny playing cards with a little man whom he did not recognize at first, but who, on turning toward him, displayed the light wild-goat's eyes, the enormous triumphant nose in a sunburned simpering face, the bald pate and the Leaguer's beard of Uncle Césaire. He answered his nephew's exclamation without putting down his cards:—

"I make myself at home, you see; I'm playing bézique with my niece."

His niece!

And Jean had taken such pains to conceal his liaison from everybody! That familiarity displeased him, and the remarks Césaire made in an undertone while Fanny was busy with the dinner. "I congratulate you, my boy—such eyes and arms! a morsel for a king!" It was much worse when Le Fénat began, at the table, to talk without the slightest reserve of the state of affairs at Castelet, of the errand that brought him to Paris. The pretended ob-

ject of his journey was to collect a sum of money, eight thousand francs, which he had loaned long ago to his friend Courbebaisse and never expected to see again; but a letter from a notary had informed him of Courbebaisse's death, *pechère!* and that his eight thousand francs were ready for him at any time. But the real cause, for the money might have been sent to him, "the real cause is your mother's health, my poor boy. She has failed very rapidly of late, and there are times when her head's all astray and she forgets everything, even the children's names. The other night, when your father left her room, she asked Divonne who that pleasant gentleman was who came to see her so often. No one but your aunt has noticed this as yet, and she only mentioned it to me to induce me to come to Paris and consult Bouchereau about the poor woman's condition, for he treated her once before."

"Has there ever been any insanity in the family?" inquired Fanny, with a grave and learned air, her La Gournerie air.

"Never," said Le Fènat; adding, with a sly smile that extended to his temples, that he had been a little cracked in his youth; "but my insanity was not displeasing to the ladies, and I didn't have to be shut up."

Jean gazed at them, heartbroken. The grief caused by the sad news was increased by an oppressive feeling of disgust at hearing that woman talk about his mother, her infirmities and her critical time of life, with the unvarnished language and the experienced air of a matron,

while she sat with her elbows on the table, rolling a cigarette. And the other, talkative and indiscreet, threw aside all reserve and told all the family secrets.

Oh! the vines—the vines were in a wretched state! And even the home place itself would not last long; half of the young shoots were destroyed already, and they saved the rest only by a miracle, tending each bunch, each grape like sick children, with drugs which cost a lot. The alarming part of it was that the consul persisted in planting new slips, which the worms attacked at once, instead of letting olive-trees and caper-bushes grow at will on all that excellent land, now entirely useless, covered with leprous and withered vines.

Luckily he, Césaire, had a few hectares on the bank of the Rhone, which he treated by immersion, a magnificent discovery applicable only on low lands. Already he had been encouraged by an excellent crop, which produced a light wine, not very heady,—"frog's wine," the consul contemptuously called it—but Le Fénat was obstinate too, and with Courbebaisse's eight thousand francs he proposed to buy Piboulette.

"You know, my boy, the little island in the Rhone, below the Abrieus' place; but this is between ourselves, no one at Castelet must have a suspicion of it."

"Not even Divonne, uncle?" queried Fanny, with a smile.

At his wife's name tears gathered in Le Fénat's eyes.

"Oh! Divonne—I never do anything without her. She

has faith in my idea too, and would be so happy if her poor Césaire should repair the fortunes of Castelet after being the beginning of its ruin."

Jean shuddered; in God's name, did he propose to confess, to tell the lamentable story of the forgeries? But the Provençal, thinking only of his affection for Divonne, had begun to talk about her, of the happiness she gave him. And she was so lovely too, such a magnificent frame!

"Here, my niece, you're a woman, you ought to be a good judge."

He took from his wallet and handed her a photograph which never left him.

From Jean's filial tone when he spoke of his aunt, from the peasant woman's maternal advice written in a coarse, slightly tremulous hand, Fanny had imagined her to be like one of the common white-capped village women of Seine-et-Oise, and was speechless with amazement at sight of that pretty face with its pure contour, brightened by the narrow white headgear, that graceful and flexible figure of a woman of thirty-five.

"Very lovely indeed," she said, pursing up her lips and with a strange inflection.

"And such a frame!" said the uncle, clinging to his image.

Then they went out on the balcony. After a day of such extreme heat that the zinc of the veranda still burned one's hand, a fine rain was falling from a stray cloud, cooling the air, pattering gayly on the roofs, drenching the

sidewalks. Paris laughed merrily under that shower, and the noise of the crowd and the carriages, the uproar ascending from the streets intoxicated the provincial, rang in his empty, volatile head like a bell, recalling his youth and a stay of three months in Paris thirty years before, with his friend Courbebaisse.

"Such sport, my children, such high old times!" And he told how they went to the Prado one Mi-Carême, Courbebaisse as Chicard, and his mistress, La Mornas, as a ballad-monger,—a disguise which brought her good luck, as she had become a *café concert* celebrity. He himself, the uncle, moored his boat to a little hussy of the quarter whose name was Pellicule. And he laughed from his mouth to his temples, as merry as a cricket, hummed dance-tunes, and beat time with his arm about his niece's waist. At midnight, when he left them to return to Hôtel Cujas, the only hotel he knew in Paris, he sang at the top of his voice on the stairs, threw kisses to his niece, who held the light for him, and shouted to Jean,—

"I say, look out for yourself!"

As soon as he had gone, Fanny, upon whose forehead there remained a preoccupied fold, passed hastily into her dressing-room, and through the half-open door, while Jean was preparing for bed, she began in an almost indifferent tone: "I say your aunt's very pretty—I am not surprised now that you talked about her so often. You probably gave poor old Le Fénat plenty of cause for jealousy."

He protested with the utmost indignation. Divonne! a second mother to him, who used to take care of him and

dress him when he was a little child! She saved him when he was sick, from death! No, no! he never had had the slightest temptation to commit such an infamous act.

"Nonsense! nonsense!" retorted the woman's strident voice, with hair-pins between her teeth; "you can't make me believe that with those eyes and the fine *frame* that imbecile talked about, his Divonne could ever have remained indifferent beside a dainty blond with a woman's skin, like you! We're all alike, you see, on the banks of the Rhone or anywhere else."

She said it with conviction, believing that her whole sex was quick to yield to every caprice and conquered by the first desire. He reiterated his denial, but he was disturbed in mind, searching his memory, asking himself if the breath of an innocent caress had ever warned him of any peril whatsoever; he could remember nothing, but the purity of his affection was sullied, the pure cameo marred with a scratch.

"There! look—this is the way they arrange the hair in your country."

Upon her lovely hair, massed in two long bands, she had pinned a handkerchief which made a very good imitation of the *catalane,* the cap in three pieces worn by the girls of Châteauneuf; and, standing very straight in front of him, in the milk-white folds of her night-dress, with flashing eyes, she asked him,—

"Do I look like Divonne?"

Oh! no, not at all; she resembled no one but herself, in that little cap which recalled the other, the Saint-Lazare

cap, in which she looked so pretty, they said, when she threw her convict a farewell kiss in the courtroom: "Don't be discouraged, *m'ami;* the happy days will return."

And that reminiscence affected him so unpleasantly that, as soon as his mistress was in bed, he hurriedly extinguished the light, to avoid looking at her.

Early the next morning the uncle arrived in fine feather, twirling his cane, and calling out, "Oho! *bébés!*" in the gamesome, patronizing tone that Courbebaisse used to adopt when he came to look for him in Pellicule's arms. He seemed even more excited than on the previous day: the Hôtel Cujas, doubtless, and more than all else, the eight thousand francs stowed away in his wallet. The money to purchase Piboulette, to be sure; but he certainly had the right to abstract a few louis in order to offer his niece a breakfast in the country.

"How about Bouchereau?" queried his nephew who could not absent himself from his office two days in succession. It was agreed that they should breakfast on the Champs-Élysées and that the two men should go afterwards to consult the doctor.

That was not what Le Fénat had dreamed of,—the arrival at St.-Cloud in great state, with the carriage filled with champagne; but the breakfast was charming none the less, on the terrace of the restaurant under the shade of the acacias and Japanese varnish-trees, with occasional snatches of choruses from a day rehearsal at the neighboring café-concert. Césaire, very talkative, very gallant,

aired all his fascinations to dazzle the Parisian. He "slanged" the waiters, complimented the chef on his *sauce meunière;* and Fanny laughed with a silly, forced heartiness, a private supper-room giggle, which annoyed Gaussin, as did the intimacy established between the uncle and the niece over his head.

You would have said that they were friends of twenty years' standing. Le Fénat, becoming sentimental with the wines served at dessert, talked about Castelet, Divonne, and also about his little Jean; he was happy to know that he was with her, a serious-minded woman who would prevent him from making a fool of himself. And he proceeded to advise her, as if she were a young bride, concerning the young man's somewhat morose disposition and the best way to treat him, tapping her arms, with thick tongue and glazed watery eyes.

He sobered off at Bouchereau's. Two hours of waiting on the first floor on Place Vendôme, in those huge salons, high and cold, filled with a silent afflicted crowd; the hell of pain of which they traversed all the zones in succession, passing from room to room to the doctor's office.

Bouchereau, with his prodigious memory, remembered Madame Gaussin very well, having been called to see her in consultation at Castelet ten years before, at the beginning of her illness; he made them describe its different phases, looked over the former prescriptions, and lost no time in reassuring the two men concerning the symptoms of cerebral disturbance which had developed and which he attributed to the use of certain drugs. While he sat

motionless at his desk, with his heavy lashes lowered over his sharp, searching little eyes, writing a long letter to his professional brother at Avignon, the uncle and nephew listened, holding their breath, to the scratching of that pen, which, so far as they were concerned, drowned all the noises of aristocratic Paris; and suddenly the power of the physician in modern times became manifest to them, the high-priest, the supreme faith, the unconquerable superstition.

Césaire left the house, grave and subdued.

"I am going back to the hotel to strap my trunk. The air of Paris doesn't agree with me, I'm afraid, my boy; if I stayed on here I should make a fool of myself. I shall take the seven-o'clock train to-night. Make my excuses to my niece, won't you?"

Jean was careful to say nothing to detain him, dreading the results of his childishness, his frivolity; and the next morning he was congratulating himself on the knowledge that he was once more under Divonne's wing, when he suddenly appeared, with dejected features and his linen in sad disorder.

"Great God! uncle, what has happened to you?"

Collapsing into an arm-chair, voiceless and limp at first, but reviving by slow degrees, the uncle confessed to a meeting with a friend of the Courbebaisse time, a too copious dinner, and the loss of the eight thousand francs in a gambling-hell during the night. Nothing left, not a sou! How could he go home and tell Divonne that? And the purchase of Piboulette. Suddenly attacked with a sort

of delirium, the Southerner put his hands over his eyes, stuffed his thumbs into his ears, howled, sobbed, cursed himself without stint, gave vent to his remorse in a general confession covering his whole life. He was the shame and the curse of his family; when individuals of his type appeared in families, their relatives would have the right to destroy them like wolves. Except for his brother's generosity, where would he be? At the galleys with thieves and forgers.

"Uncle, uncle!" cried Gaussin, distressed beyond measure, and trying to stop him.

But the other, willfully blind and deaf, took delight in that public declaration of his crime, which he described in its most trivial details, while Fanny gazed at him in pity blended with admiration. He was a passionate fellow, at all events, just such a scapegrace as she liked; and, deeply moved by his predicament, like the good-natured creature she was, she tried to devise some way of assisting him. But what could she do? She had seen nobody for a year, Jean had no connections. Suddenly a name came to her mind: Déchelette! He was undoubtedly in Paris at that moment, and he was such a kind-hearted fellow!

"But I hardly know him," said Jean.

"I will go to him myself."

"What! do you mean it?"

"Why not?"

Their glances met and understood each other. Déchelette also had been her lover, the lover of a night whom she hardly remembered. But he never forgot one; they

were all arranged in order in his head, like the saints on a calendar.

"If it annoys you," she began, a little embarrassed. Thereupon Césaire, who, during that short discussion, had ceased his howling, bestowed upon them such a despairing, imploring glance that Jean submitted, consented between his teeth.

How interminable that hour seemed to both of them, distracted as they were by thoughts which they did not divulge to each other, as they leaned on the balcony rail, waiting for the woman's return.

"Does this Déchelette live very far away?"

"Why, no, on Rue de Rome—only a step," replied Jean fiercely, for he too thought that Fanny was very slow in returning. He tried to comfort himself with the engineer's motto in love: "No to-morrow," and the scornful tone in which he had heard him speak of Sapho as of an ex-star of the world of gallantry; but his lover's pride rebelled, and he could almost have wished that Déchelette would still consider her beautiful and desirable. Ah, why need that crackbrained old Césaire re-open all his wounds thus!

At last Fanny's cape turned the corner of the street. She returned with a beaming face.

"It's all right; I have the money."

When the eight thousand francs were spread out before him, the uncle wept with joy, insisted on giving a receipt, on fixing the rate of interest and the date of repayment.

"There's no need of it, uncle. I didn't mention your name. I am the one to whom the money was loaned, and you owe it to me for as long a time as you please."

"Such a service," replied Césaire, beside himself with gratitude, "is repaid with a friendship that never ends." And at the station, whither Gaussin accompanied him to make sure that he really took the train, he said with tears in his eyes: "What a woman! what a treasure! You must make her happy, I tell you."

Jean was much depressed by that episode, feeling that his chain, already so burdensome, was drawn tighter and tighter, and that two things had become blended which his innate delicacy had always kept separate and distinct: his family and his liaison. Now Césaire kept the mistress informed about all his labors, his plantations, gave her all the news of Castelet; and Fanny criticized the consul's obstinacy in the matter of vines, talked about his mother's health, irritated Jean with her solicitude or with misplaced advice. Never an allusion to the service she had rendered him. No, indeed, nor to Le Fénat's former experience, that blot on the fair fame of the house of Armandy, which the uncle had laid bare before her. Once only did she use it as a weapon of retort, under the following circumstances.

They were returning from the theater, and, as it was raining, they took a cab at a stand on the boulevard. The cab, one of those lumbering affairs which appear only after midnight, was a long while in starting, the man half asleep and the horse shaking his nose-bag. While they

were waiting inside the vehicle out of the rain, an old driver, who was tying a new lash on his whip, calmly walked up to the door, his twine between his teeth, and said to Fanny in a cracked voice, reeking with liquor,—

"Good-evening. How goes it?"

"Hallo, is it you?"

She gave a little start, quickly repressed, and said to her lover in an undertone, "My father!"

Her father—that night-prowler in a long ex-livery cape, stained with mud and minus some of its metal buttons, and displaying in the light of the street lamp a bloated face, purple with alcohol, in which Gaussin fancied that he could recognize, in a vulgarized form, Fanny's regular, sensuous profile, her great lustful eyes! Without paying any heed to the man who accompanied his daughter, and as if he had not seen him, Père Legrand proceeded to give her news of the family. "The old woman's been at Necker for a fortnight; she's in a bad way. Go and see her some day; it will cheer her up. As for me, luckily the box-seat holds firm; still a good whip and a good lash. But business ain't very good. If you happen to want a good coachman by the month, that would just suit me. No? All right, then, and good-bye till I see you again."

They shook hands limply; the cab started.

"Well, would you believe it?" murmured Fanny; and she began at once to tell him at length about her family, a subject which she had always avoided, "it was so ghastly,

so degrading!" but they knew each other better now; they had nothing to conceal from each other.

She was born at the Moulin-aux-Anglais, an inn in the suburbs, of that father, an ex-dragoon, who drove the stage from Paris to Châtillon, and of an inn-servant, between two trips to the bar.

She had never known her mother, who died in giving birth to her; but the proprietors of the house, like honest people, compelled the father to acknowledge his little one and to pay for her nursing. He dared not refuse, for he owed a large sum there; and when Fanny was four years old, he took her on the stage like a little dog, perched away up under the hood, highly delighted to bowl along the roads, to watch the lights of the lanterns running alongside, the smoking, panting flanks of the horses, and to fall asleep in the darkness and the wind, listening to the tinkling bells.

But Père Legrand soon tired of that essay in paternity; little as it cost, he had to feed and dress the brat. And then, too, she was an embarrassment to him in the matter of a marriage with a market-gardener's widow upon whose melon-beds and long lines of cabbages, by which his route lay, he had cast a longing eye. She had at that time a very well-defined conviction that her father intended to destroy her; that was the drunkard's absorbing idea, to rid himself of the child at any price; and if the widow herself, good Mère Machaume, had not taken her under the protection—

"By the way, you knew Machaume," said Fanny.

"What! that servant I saw at your old apartments?"

"She was my step-mother. She was so kind to me when I was little; I took her into my service to rescue her from her cur of a husband, who, after using up all her property, beat her and compelled her to wait on a trollop with whom he was living. Ah! poor Machaume, she knows what a handsome man costs. Well, when she left me, in spite of all I could say to her, she lost no time in taking up with him again, and now here she is at the hospital. How fast he goes backward without her, the old rascal! how dirty he was! what a ragpicker's look! there's nothing left of him but his whip—did you see how straight he held it? Even when he's too drunk to stand, he'll carry it in front of him like a taper and put it in his room; he never kept anything decent but that. 'Good whip, good lash,' that's his motto."

She talked about him unconsciously, as a stranger, without disgust or shame; and Jean was appalled to hear her. Such a father! such a mother!—compared with the consul's stern features and Madame Gaussin's angelic smile! And realizing suddenly the full significance of her lover's silence, his revolt against that social filth with which he was splashed by living with her, Fanny observed in a philosophical tone: "After all, there seems to be something of the sort in all families; and we're not responsible for it. I have my Père Legrand; you have your Uncle Césaire."

VI

"My dear boy,—As I write you I am still all in a tremble from the terrible anxiety we have had; our twins disappeared, away from Castelet a whole day and night and the morning of the next day!

"It was Sunday at breakfast time that we noticed that the little ones were missing. I had dressed them nicely for the eight-o'clock mass to which the consul was to take them; then I thought no more about it, being busy with your mother, who was more nervous than usual, as if she had a presentiment of the misfortune that was hovering over us. You know, ever since she's been sick, she has been able to foresee what was going to happen; and the less able she is to move, the more busily her brain works.

"Luckily your mother was in her chamber, and the rest of us were all in the living-room waiting for the little ones; we shouted for them all over the home-place, the shepherd blew the great whistle he calls the sheep with; then Césaire in one direction, I in another, Rousseline, Tardive, everybody rushed all about Castelet, and whenever one of us met another, it was: 'Well?'—'Haven't found anything.' At last we didn't dare ask; with beating heart we went to the well below the long windows of the hay-loft. What a day! And I had to go up every minute

or two to your mother, to smile calmly, and explain the absence of the little ones by saying that I had sent them to pass Sunday with their aunt at Vallamuris. She seemed to believe it; but late in the night, while I was sitting up with her, and looking through the window at the lights moving about in the fields and on the Rhone, searching for the children, I heard her crying softly in her bed; and when I questioned her, 'I am crying on account of something which you are hiding from me, but which I have guessed all the same,' she replied, in the girlish voice which her suffering has brought back; and without saying anything more, we both worried our hearts out, keeping our grief to ourselves.

"At last, my dear child, not to make the painful story too long, on Monday morning our little ones were brought back to us by the workmen whom your uncle employs on the island, who had found them on a pile of vine-branches, pale with cold and hunger after that night in the open air, and all surrounded by the water. And this is what they told us in the innocence of their little hearts. For a long time they had been beset by the idea of doing like their patron saints, Marthe and Marie, whose story they had read, of starting off in a boat without sails or oars or food of any sort, and spreading the Gospel on the first shore to which God's breath might carry them. And so, on Sunday after mass, they cast off a fishing-boat, and, kneeling in the bottom like the holy women, they floated quietly along with the current and ran aground among the reeds of Piboulette, notwithstanding the fresh-

ets, the high wind, the *révouluns*. Yes, the good Lord took care of them; and it was He who gave them back to us, the Pretties! with their Sunday ruffles a little rumpled, and the gilding on their prayer-books marred. We had not the heart to scold them, but only to hug and kiss them; but we are still sick with the fright we had.

"The most affected of all was your mother, who, although we had told her nothing about it, felt death passing over Castelet, as she says; and she, ordinarily so placid and cheerful, still retains a sadness which nothing seems to cure, although your father and I and everybody are tenderly devoted to her. And suppose I should tell you, my dear Jean, that it is on your account more than any other that she is anxious and depressed? She dares not say so before your father, who wishes you to be left undisturbed at your work, but you didn't come after your examination as you promised. Give us a surprise for the Christmas holiday; help an invalid to recover her lovely smile. If you knew how bitterly we regret, when we no longer have our old people with us, that we did not give them more of our time!"

Standing by the window, where the light of a winter's sun filtered sluggishly in through the fog, Jean read that letter, relished to the full its flavor of the fields, the cherished memories of affection and sunlight.

"What's that?—let me see."

Fanny had just awakened in the yellow light that found its way between the parted curtains, and, heavy with sleep, mechanically put out her hand to the box of Mary-

land tobacco that always stood on her night table. He hesitated, knowing how the mere name of Divonne always inflamed his mistress's jealousy; but how could he refuse to show her the letter, when she recognized the paper and the handwriting?

At first the little girls' escapade appealed to her sympathies with charming effect, as she sat up in bed, both arms and breast bare, amid the waves of her brown hair, reading and rolling a cigarette; but the closing words irritated her to frenzy, and she crumpled up the letter and threw it across the room.

"I'll find a way to stop her mouth, about her holy women! It's all a scheme to make you leave Paris. She misses her handsome nephew, the—"

He tried to check her, to prevent her uttering the filthy word which she hurled at him, followed by a long string of the same sort. She had never given vent to her passion in such vulgar language before him, in such an overflowing torrent of foul anger, as from a sewer that had burst and discharged its slime and its stench. All the slang of her past as prostitute and street arab swelled her throat and distended her lip.

Easy enough to see what they all wanted down there. Césaire had tattled and there was a family scheme to break off their connection, to lure him back to the province with Divonne's fine frame as a bait.

"Let me tell you this, if you go I'll write to your cuckold. I'll give him warning—ah! upon my word!—"

As she spoke she gathered herself together on the bed with an expression of bitter hatred, with hollow cheeks and staring eyes like a vicious beast preparing to spring.

And Gaussin remembered that he had seen her so on Rue de l'Arcade, but now it was against him that that bellowing hatred was directed, which tempted him to fall upon his misress and beat her; for in such carnal passions, where respect and esteem for the loved one are null, brutality always comes to the surface in wrath or in caresses. He was afraid of himself, left the house abruptly for his office, and as he walked along inveighed bitterly against the life he had marked out for himself. That would teach him to put himself in the power of such a woman! What infamous, ghastly insults! His sisters, his mother, no one was spared. What! had he not even the right to go and see his people? Why, in what sort of a prison had he voluntarily confined himself? And the whole course of their liaison passed through his mind; he saw how the Egyptian's lovely bare arms, twined about his neck on the night of the ball, had clung to him despotically and firmly, isolating him from his friends and his family. Now his mind was made up. That very night, come what may, he would start for Castelet.

Some matters of business despatched, his leave of absence obtained at headquarters, he returned home early, expecting a terrible scene, prepared for anything, even a rupture. But the sweet greeting with which Fanny met him, her heavy eyes, her cheeks, softened as it were with tears, left him hardly the courage to assert his will.

"I am going to-night," he said, straightening himself up.

"You are quite right, *m'ami*. Go and see your mother, and above all—" she drew nearer to him coaxingly—"forget how naughty I was; I love you too much, it is my mania."

All the rest of the day, while she packed his trunk with coquettish solicitude, as sweet and attractive as in the early days, she maintained that penitent attitude, perhaps with the idea of detaining him. But not once did she say to him, "Stay;" and when, at the last moment, all hope having vanished in face of the final preparations, she nestled close to her lover, trying to impregnate him with her for the whole time of his journey and his absence, her farewell, her kiss murmured only this: "Tell me, Jean, you are not angry with me, are you?"

Oh! the intoxicating joy of awakening in the morning in the room that was his when he was a child, his heart still warm from the embraces of his dear ones, the outpouring of joy at his arrival, of finding in the same place, on the mosquito bar of his little bed, the same shaft of light that he had always looked for when he awoke, of hearing the cries of the peacocks on their perches, the creaking of the well-chain, the cattle rushing from the sheds with hurrying feet, and, when he had thrown his shutters back against the wall, of seeing once more that lovely warm light which entered the room in sheets, as if the floodgates had been opened, and that marvelous

prospect of sloping vineyards, cypresses, olive trees and glistening pine woods, stretching away to the Rhone beneath a deep, cloudless sky, without a fleck of mist notwithstanding the early hour,—a green sky, swept all night by the mistral which still filled the great valley with its strong cheery breath.

Jean compared that awakening to those in Paris beneath a sky as murky as his love, and felt happy and free. He went downstairs. The house, white with sunlight, was still asleep, all the shutters closed like the eyes of those within; and he was glad of a moment of solitude to recover himself, in that moral convalescence which he felt was just beginning for him.

He walked a few steps along the terrace, took an ascending path in the park—in what they called the park, a forest of pines and myrtles planted at random on the rough hill of Castelet, cut by irregular paths made slippery by dry pine needles. His dog, Miracle, very old and lame, had come out of his kennel, and followed silently at his heels; how often they had taken that walk together in the morning!

At the entrance to the vineyards, where the tall cypresses that formed the line of demarcation bent their graceful pointed tops, the dog hesitated; he knew how hard the thick layer of sand—a new remedy for the phylloxera with which the consul was experimenting—and the embankments supporting the terrace would be for his poor old paws. The joy of accompanying his master turned the scale at last, however; and at every obstacle

there were painful struggles, a timid little whine, brief halts, and the awkward antics of a crab on a rock. Jean did not look at him, being entirely absorbed by the new alicant plants, of which his father had had much to say to him the night before. The shoots seemed to be flourishing in the smooth, glistening sand. At last the poor man was to be repaid for his persistent labors; the Castelet vintage would still live when La Nerte, L'Ermitage, all the famous native wines of the South were dead!

A little white cap suddenly appeared in front of him. It was Divonne, the first one astir in the house; she had a reaping-hook in her hand, and something else which she threw away; and her cheeks, ordinarily so colorless, were dyed with a sudden crimson flush. "Is it you, Jean? You frightened me; I thought it was your father." She recovered her self-possession in an instant, and kissed him. "Did you sleep well?"

"Very well, aunt; but why did you dread my father's coming?"

"Why?"

She picked up the root she had just torn from the ground.

"The consul told you, didn't he, that this time he was sure of success? Well, look! there's the creature."

Jean saw a tiny bit of yellowish moss buried in the wood, the imperceptible mould that has brought ruin step by step upon entire provinces; and it seemed an ironical freak of nature, on that glorious morning, in that vivify-

ing sunlight—that infinitesimal object, destructive and indestructible.

"That's the beginning. In three months the whole farm will be destroyed, and your father will begin all over again, for his pride is at stake. There will be more new plants and new remedies until the day when—"

A despairing gesture completed and emphasized her sentence.

"Really? is it as bad as that?"

"Oh! you know the consul. He never says a word, and gives me the money for the month as usual; but I see that he's preoccupied. He goes to Avignon and Orange. He is trying to raise the money."

"And Césaire? what about his immersions?" the young man asked in dismay.

Thank God, everything was going finely in that direction. They had had fifty casks of wine from the last crop; and this year the product would be twice that. In view of his success the consul had surrendered to his brother all the vineyards in the plain, which had hitherto been allowed to lie fallow, with long lines of dead stumps like a cemetery; and now they were under water for three months.

And the Provençal, proud of her man's work, of her Fénat, pointed out to Jean from their elevated position several great ponds—*clairs* she called them—kept full by embankments of lime as on the salt-marshes.

"Those plants will bear in two years; and so will Pibou-

lette, and the island of Lamotte, which your uncle has bought without telling anybody. Then we shall be rich, but we must hold hard till then; every one must contribute and sacrifice himself."

She talked cheerfully of sacrifice, like a woman who has ceased to wonder at it, and with such contagious enthusiasm that Jean, impelled by a sudden thought, replied in the same tone: "We will sacrifice ourselves, Divonne."

That very day he wrote to Fanny that his parents could not continue his allowance, that he should be reduced to his salary at the department, and that, under those conditions, it was impossible for them to live together. The result was an earlier separation than he expected, three or four years before his anticipated departure from France; but he felt sure that his mistress would accept those weighty reasons, and that she would take pity upon him and his trouble, would assist him in that painful performance of a bounden duty.

Was it really a sacrifice? Was he not, on the contrary, relieved to put an end to an existence which seemed hateful and unhealthy to him, especially since he had returned to nature, to his family, to simple and upright affections? His letter written, without great effort and without pain, he relied upon the virtuous and loyal affection of the honest hearts about him, upon the example of that father, proudest and most upright of men; upon the innocent smile of the little holy women, and also upon that boundless, peaceful horizon, the health-giving emanations from the mountains, the sky above him, the swift-

flowing, eager river, to defend him against what he foresaw would be a fierce reply, full of threats and extravagant language; for, as he thought of his passion, of all the villainous elements of which it was composed, it seemed to him that he was just recovering from a wasting fever of the sort caused by the exhalations from swamp-lands.

Five or six days passed in the silence that follows a decisive blow. Morning and night Jean went to the post and returned empty-handed, strangely perturbed in mind. What was she doing? What had she decided upon, and, in any event, why not reply? He thought of nothing else. And at night, when everybody at Castelet was sleeping soundly, and the wind crooning through the long corridors, he and Césaire discussed it in his little room.

"She's likely to turn up here!" the uncle declared; and his anxiety was greatly increased by the fact that the letter of rupture contained two notes, on six months and a year's time, to adjust his debt and the interest thereon. How could he pay those notes? How could he explain to Divonne? He shuddered at the bare thought, and made his nephew unhappy when he remarked with a long face, as he shook the ashes from his pipe at the conclusion of their midnight interview, "Well, good-night; at all events, what you have done is quite right."

At last this reply arrived, and after reading the first lines—"My dear man, I have not written to you sooner, because I was determined to prove to you otherwise than by words how well I understand you and love you,"—Jean stopped, as surprised as a man who hears a symphony

instead of the signal for capitulation that he dreaded. He turned hastily to the last page, where he read—"remain until death your dog who loves you, whom you can beat if you choose, and who sends you a passionately loving kiss."

So she had not received his letter! But when he read it through, line by line, with tears in his eyes, it proved to be really a reply, and said that Fanny had long anticipated the bad news of the trouble at Castelet, which would hasten the inevitable separation. She had at once set about finding some employment in order that she might no longer remain a burden to him, and she had found a position as manager of a lodging-house on Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, in the service of a very wealthy lady. A hundred francs a month with board and lodging, and her Sundays free.

"You understand, my man, one day a week to love each other; for you will still love me, won't you? You will repay me for the great effort I am making, working for the first time in my life, for the night and day slavery which I accept, with humiliations which you cannot imagine and which will be a sore trial to my craze for independence. But I feel a most extraordinary satisfaction in suffering for love of you. I owe you so much, you have taught me so many good, honorable things that no one had ever mentioned to me! Ah! if we had only met sooner! But before you had learned to walk, I was lying in men's arms. But not one of them all can boast of having led me to make such a resolution in order to keep him a little longer.

Now, return when you choose, the apartment is empty. I have looked over all my things; that was the hardest of all, to clean out the drawers and throw away the souvenirs. You will find only my portrait left, and that will cost you nothing; nothing but the kind glances which I beg in its favor. Ah! *m'ami, m'ami!* However, if you keep my Sunday for me, and my little place in your neck, my place, you know—" And there followed loving phrases, cajoleries, the voluptuous wantonness of a cat, coupled with passionate words which made the lover rub his face against the glossy paper, as if the warm human caress were transmitted by it.

"Doesn't she mention my notes?" asked Uncle Césaire, timidly.

"She sends them back to you. You can repay her when you are rich."

The uncle breathed a sigh of relief, his temples wrinkled with satisfaction, and with portentous gravity, with his strong Southern accent, he said,—

"Ah! do you want me to tell you something? That woman's a saint!"

Then, passing to another line of thought, with the instability, the lack of logic and of memory which was one of the absurdities of his character: "And such passion, my boy, such fire! Why, my mouth is all parched as it used to be when Courbebaisse read me his letters from La Mornas."

Once more Jean had to submit to the story of the first journey to Paris, the Hôtel Cujas and Pellicule; but he

did not hear, as he leaned on the sill of the open window, in the peaceful night bathed by a full moon, so bright that the roosters were deceived and hailed it as the break of day.

So this redemption by love of which poets sing is a reality! and he was conscious of a sort of pride in the thought that all those great, those illustrious men whom Fanny had loved before his time, far from regenerating her, had made her more depraved, whereas he, solely by the power of his upright nature, might perhaps redeem her from vice forever.

He was grateful to her for having devised that middle course, that semi-rupture in which she would acquire the new habit of labor so hard for her indolent nature; and he wrote her the next day in a fatherly tone, the tone of an elderly gentleman, to encourage her in her scheme of reformation and to express his uneasiness concerning the quality of the house she was managing and the class of people who resorted to it; for he distrusted her indulgence and her readiness to say, as she submitted to his will: "What do you want? Is this right?"

By return mail Fanny, with the docility of a little girl, drew a picture of her lodging-house, a regular family hotel occupied by foreigners. On the first floor were some Peruvians, father and mother, children and numerous servants; on the second a Russian family and a wealthy Dutchman, a coral merchant. The chambers on the third were let to two riders from the Hippodrome, Englishmen of good form, very *comme il faut,* and the most interesting

little family, Mademoiselle Minna Vogel, a zither-player from Stuttgart, with her brother Leo, a poor consumptive, who had been obliged to break off his studies at the Paris Conservatoire, and whom his tall sister had come to Paris to take care of, with no other means of paying for their board and lodging than the proceeds of a few concerts.

"The most touching and most honorable company imaginable, as you see, my dear man. I myself am supposed to be a widow, and I am treated with the utmost consideration. Indeed, I would not suffer it to be otherwise; your wife must be respected. Pray understand me when I say 'your wife.' I know that you will go away some day, that I shall lose you, but there will never be another after you; I shall remain yours forever, retaining the taste of your caresses and the good instincts you have aroused in me. It's very absurd, isn't it?—Sapho virtuous! Yes, virtuous, when you are no longer here; but for you I shall remain as you have loved me, passionate and ardent. I adore you!"

Jean was suddenly attacked with a feeling of intense depression and ennui. These returns of the prodigal son, after the first joys of the arrival, the orgies of effusive affection and fatted calf, are always poisoned by memories of the associations of the wandering life, regret for the bitter husks and for the indolent flocks. It is a sort of disenchantment with persons and things, which seem suddenly devoid of attraction and colorless. The Provençal winter mornings lost their bracing, health-giving quality for him, the hunting of the beautiful reddish-brown otter

lost its attraction, and the wild-duck shooting in old Abrieu's *nayechien*. The wind seemed bitter to Jean, the water rough, and very tedious were the excursions among the inundated vineyards with his uncle explaining his system of dams, floodgates, and trenches.

The village, which he viewed for the first few days through the memories of his former experiences as a small boy,—a village of old shanties, some abandoned,—smelt of death and desolation like an Italian village; and when he went to the post, on the tottering stone step of every door he must submit to the tiresome repetitions of all the old men, twisted like trees exposed to the wind, with their arms thrust through stocking legs, and of the old women with chins like yellow boxwood under their tight-fitting caps, with little eyes, gleaming and sparkling like lizards' eyes in the crevices of old walls.

Always the same lamentations over the death of the vines, the end of the madder, the disease of the mulberry-trees, the seven plagues of Egypt ruining that fair land of Provence; and to avoid them, he sometimes returned by way of the steep lanes that skirt the old walls of the château of the Popes, deserted lanes obstructed by underbrush, by the tall Saint-Roch grass, useful as a cure for ring-worm, extremely well placed in that nook out of the Middle Ages, in the shadow of the immense ruin towering over the road.

Then he would meet the curé Malassagne, on his way from saying mass, coming down the hill with long, excited strides, his band awry, his cassock held up with both

hands because of the thorns and the weeds. The priest would stop and inveigh against the impiety of the peasants, the infamous conduct of the municipal council; he would hurl his malediction at the fields, cattle and men, backsliders who no longer came to service, who buried their dead without the sacraments and treated their own ailments with magnetism or spiritualism, to save the expense of a priest and a doctor.

"Yes, monsieur, spiritualism! that's what the peasants of the Comitat are coming to! And you expect that your vines won't be diseased!"

Jean, who perhaps had a letter from Fanny open and burning in his pocket, would listen with an absent expression, escape from the priest's sermon as quickly as possible, return to Castelet, and ensconce himself in a cleft in the cliff,—what the Provençaux call a *cagnard*,—sheltered from the wind that blows all about and concentrating the warmth of the sun's rays reflected from the rock.

He would select the most secluded and the wildest, overgrown by bramble-bushes and kermes oaks, and would lie on the ground to read his letter; and gradually the subtle odor it exhaled, the caressing words, the images evoked would produce a sensuous drunkenness which quickened his pulse and created an hallucination so powerful as to cause the whole landscape to vanish like useless stage-properties,—the river, the clustered islets, the villages in the hollows of the little alps, the whole sweep of the vast valley where the fierce gust of wind pursued the sunbeams and drove them in waves before it. He was

in their bedroom, opposite the gray-roofed station, a prey to the caresses, the fierce passions which caused them to cling to each other with the convulsive grasp of a drowning man.

Suddenly he would hear steps in the path, and limpid laughter: "There he is!" His sisters would appear, their little legs bare amid the heather, escorted by old Miracle as proud as Lucifer to have followed his master's trail, and wagging his tail triumphantly; but Jean would send him away with a kick, and decline the offers to play at hide-and-seek or tag, which they timidly put forward. And yet he loved them, his little twin-sisters who doted on their big brother always so far away; he had become a child for their benefit as soon as he arrived, and he was amused by the contrast between the pretty creatures, born at the same time and so dissimilar. One was tall and dark, with curly hair, of a mystic turn and headstrong; it was she who had conceived the idea of the boat, excited by what Malassagne the curé had read to her; and that little Marie the Egyptian had drawn into her scheme the fair-haired Marthe, who was a gentle, yielding creature, resembling her mother and brother.

But what a hateful annoyance it was, while he was living amid his memories, to have those innocent caresses mingling with the dainty perfume that his mistress's letter left upon him. "No, leave me; I must work." And he would return to the house, intending to shut himself up in his room, when his father would call to him as he passed,—

"Is it you, Jean—just listen to this."

The mail hour brought new cause for depression to that man, naturally of a gloomy turn of mind, and retaining from his life in the East a habit of solemn silence, broken abruptly by reminiscences,—"when I was consul at Hong-Kong,"—which blazed out like the sparks from old stumps on the fire. While he listened to his father reading and discussing the morning papers, Jean would gaze at Caoudal's *Sapho* on the mantel, her arms around her knees, her lyre by her side,—the WHOLE LYRE,—a bronze copy purchased twenty years before at the time of the improvements at Castelet; and that bronze, which made him sick at heart in the shop-windows in Paris, aroused an amorous emotion in him, made him long to kiss those shoulders, to unclasp those cold, polished hands, to hear her say to him, "Sapho to you, but to none but you!"

The tempting figure rose before him when he went out, walked with him, doubled the sound of his footsteps on the broad, pretentious staircase. The pendulum of the old clock beat time to the name of Sapho, the wind whispered it through the long, cold, flagged corridors of that summer dwelling, he found it in all the books of the country library, old volumes with red edges, where the crumbs of his luncheons as a child still lingered in the stitching. And that persistent souvenir of his mistress pursued him even to his mother's bedroom, where Divonne was arranging the invalid's lovely white hair, combing it back from her face, which had retained its placidity and its bright color notwithstanding her constant and varied suffering.

"Ah! here's our Jean," the mother would say. But his aunt, with her bare neck, her little cap, her sleeves turned back for the purposes of that invalid's toilet of which she alone had charge, reminded him of other awakenings, recalled his mistress again, leaping out of bed amid the smoke of her first cigarette. He hated himself for such thoughts, especially in that chamber! But what could he do to avoid them?

"Our child is no longer the same, sister," Madame Gaussin would say sadly. "What's the matter with him?" And they would try together to divine the reason. Divonne cudgeled her ingenuous brain, she would have liked to question the young man, but he seemed to shun her now, to avoid being alone with her.

One morning, having watched him, she surprised him in his *cagnard,* trembling in the fever of his letters and his bad dreams. He rose, with a gloomy expression. She detained him, made him sit down beside her on the warm stone. "Don't you love me any more? Am I no longer your Divonne to whom you used to tell all your troubles?"

"Why yes, why yes," he stammered, disturbed by her affectionate manner, and averting his eyes so that she might not see in them any suggestion of what he had just been reading,—love-calls, desperate shrieks, the delirious utterances of passion at a distance. "What is the matter with you? Why are you so depressed?" murmured Divonne, coaxing him with voice and hands, as one deals with children. He was her child in a certain sense; in her

eyes he was still ten years old, the age at which little men are emancipated.

He, already inflamed by his letter, quivered under the disturbing fascination of that lovely body so near his own, of those lips warm with the blood quickened by the fresh breeze that disarranged her hair and sent it flying about over her forehead in dainty curls after the Parisian fashion. And Sapho's lessons—"All women are the same; in the presence of a man they have but one idea in their heads"—made the peasant woman's happy smile and the gesture with which she detained him to listen to her affectionate questions an incitement of his passions.

Suddenly he felt the blinding rush of an evil temptation to his brain; and the effort he made to resist it shook him with a convulsive shudder. Divonne was dismayed to see him so pale, with his teeth chattering. "Why, the poor boy —he has the fever!" With an affectionate unreflecting movement, she untied the broad handkerchief that she wore over her shoulders to put it around his neck; but she was suddenly seized, enveloped, and felt the burning pressure of a frantic kiss on her neck and shoulders, on all the gleaming flesh suddenly laid bare to the sunlight. She had no time to cry out nor to defend herself, perhaps not even a clear perception of what had taken place. "Ah! I am mad—I am mad!" He rushed away and was already far off on the moor, where the stones rolled viciously beneath his feet.

At breakfast that day Jean announced that he must go

away that same evening, being summoned to Paris by an order from the Minister.

"Go away already! Why, you said— You have only just come!"

There were outcries and entreaties. But he could not remain with them, since Sapho's agitating, corrupting influence persistently intervened between him and all those loving hearts. Moreover, had he not made the greatest of all sacrifices to them by abandoning his life *à deux?* The definitive rupture would be consummated a little later; and then he would return to embrace them all and give his heart to them without shame or embarrassment.

It was late at night, the family had retired, and the house was dark when Césaire returned after accompanying his nephew to the train at Avignon. After he had fed the horse and glanced at the sky—the glance of men who live by the products of the soil, to see what the weather promises to be—he was about to enter the house, when he saw a white form on a bench on the terrace.

"Is that you, Divonne?"

"Yes, I was waiting for you."

Being very busy all day, necessarily separated from her Fénat, whom she adored, she had the evening for talking with him and for a little walk together. Was it because of the brief scene between herself and Jean, which, upon thinking it over, she understood even better than she would have liked, or was it because of the emotion aroused by watching the poor mother weep silently all day? Whatever the cause her voice trembled and her mind was dis-

turbed to an extraordinary degree in a person usually so calm and devoted to her duty. "Do you know why he left us so suddenly?" She did not believe in that story about the Minister, suspecting rather some unworthy attachment which was drawing him away from his family. There were so many perils, such fatal associations in that depraved Paris!

Césaire, who could not conceal anything from her, admitted that there was a woman in Jean's life, but an excellent creature, incapable of alienating him from his own people; and he talked about her devotion, the affecting letters she wrote, lauded especially her heroic resolution to work, which seemed perfectly natural to the peasant woman. "For after all one must work to live."

"Not that sort of women," said Césaire.

"Then you mean that Jean is living with a good-for-nothing? And you have been to their house?"

"I swear to you, Divonne, that there isn't a purer or more virtuous woman on earth than she's been since she knew him. Love has rehabilitated her."

But his words were too long; Divonne did not understand them. To her mind that woman belonged to the riff-raff which she called "bad women," and the thought that her Jean was the victim of such a creature angered her. Suppose the consul should get an inkling of it!

Césaire tried to calm her, assured her, by all the wrinkles in her somewhat dissipated, good-humored face, that at the boy's age one could not do without women.

"*Pardi!* then let him marry," she said with affecting earnestness.

"At all events, they're no longer together; it is all right—"

"Listen, Césaire," she rejoined in a serious tone, "you know our old saying: 'The misfortune always lasts longer than the man who causes it.' If what you say is true, if Jean has drawn that woman out of the mud, perhaps he has soiled himself in that unpleasant task. Possibly he may have made her better and more virtuous, but who knows if the evil that was in her hasn't spoiled our child to the very core?"

They were walking back toward the terrace. Night, peaceful and clear, reigned over the whole silent valley, where nothing was alive save the glistening moonlight, the rolling river, the ponds lying like pools of silver. Everywhere profound tranquillity, a sense of remoteness, the untroubled repose of dreamless sleep. Suddenly the up train rumbled heavily along the bank of the Rhone at full speed.

"Oh! that Paris!" exclaimed Divonne, shaking her fist at the foe upon whom the provinces vent all their wrath, "that Paris!—to think of what we give it and what it sends back to us!"

VII

It was cold and foggy one dark afternoon at four o'clock, even on the broad Avenue des Champs-Elysées, where the carriages drove hurriedly by with a dull, muffled roar. Jean was hardly able to read, at the end of a small garden, the gate of which stood open, these words in gilt letters, high in the air, over the entresol of a house of very comfortable and placid cottage-like aspect: *Furnished Apartments, Family Hotel.* A coupé was waiting at the curbstone.

Opening the door, Jean at once saw her whom he sought, sitting in the light from the window, and turning the leaves of a huge account book, opposite another woman, tall and fashionably dressed, with a handkerchief and a small shopping-bag in her hands.

"What do you wish, monsieur?" Fanny recognized him, sprang to her feet in amazement, and said in an undertone as she passed her companion, "It's the little one." The other eyed Gaussin from head to foot with the charming expert *sang-froid* which experience imparts, and said, quite loud, without the slightest ceremony: "Embrace, children—I am not looking." Then she took Fanny's place and began to verify her figures.

They held each other's hands and were whispering meaningless phrases "How are you?"—"Very well,

thanks."—"You must have left last night?" But the trembling of their voices gave the words their true meaning. As they sat together on the sofa, Fanny, recovering her self-possession to some extent, asked him under her breath: "Don't you recognize my employer? You have seen her before, at Déchelette's ball, as a Spanish bride. The bride's freshness has worn off a little, eh?"

"Then it's—?"

"Rosario Sanches, de Potter's mistress."

This Rosario—Rosa was her pet name, written on the mirrors of all the night restaurants and always with some obscenity underneath—was a former "chariot lady" at the Hippodrome, famous in the world of pleasure for her cynical dissoluteness and for the blows of her tongue and her whip and much sought after by club men, whom she drove as she did her horses.

A Spaniard from Oran, she had been beautiful rather than pretty, and still produced by artificial light considerable effect with her black eyes touched with bistre, and her eyebrows connected as by a hyphen; but even in that dim light her fifty years were plainly marked upon a lifeless, harsh face, with a rough yellow skin like a lemon of her native country. She had been an intimate friend of Fanny Legrand for years, had been her chaperone in gallantry, and the mere mention of her name alarmed the lover.

Fanny, who understood the trembling of his arm, tried to excuse herself. To whom was she to apply to find em-

ployment? She was very much perplexed. Besides, Rosa was leading a respectable life now; she was rich, very rich, and lived at her mansion on Avenue de Villiers or at her villa at Enghien, receiving a few old friends, but only one lover, the same old one, her musician.

"De Potter?" said Paul; "I thought he was married."

"So he is, married and has children; it seems indeed that his wife is pretty, but that didn't prevent his coming back to the old flame; and if you could see how she talks to him, how she treats him. Ah! he's badly bitten, I tell you." She pressed his hand in loving reproof. At that moment the lady looked up from her book and addressed her bag, which was jumping about at the end of its ribbon,—

"Just keep quiet, will you!" Then to the housekeeper in a tone of command: "Give me a piece of sugar quickly for Bichito."

Fanny rose, brought the sugar and held it to the opening of the reticule, with an abundance of flattering, childish talk. "Just look at the pretty creature!" she said to her lover, pointing to a sort of fat lizard surrounded with cotton-wool, a deformed, scaly beast, crested and dentelated, with a hooded head above a mass of shivering, gelatinous flesh; a chameleon sent from Algeria to Rosa, who protected it from the Parisian winter by care and warmth. She loved it as she had never loved any man; and Jean readily divined from Fanny's sycophantic endearments the place that the horrid beast occupied in the house.

The lady closed the book and prepared to take her leave. "Not very bad for the second fortnight. But be careful about the candles."

She cast a proprietress's glance around the little salon which was very neat and orderly with its plush-covered furniture, blew a little dust from the plant on the table, and pointed out a rent in the window-curtain; after which she said to the young people with a cunning leer: "No nonsense, you know my children; the house is perfectly respectable;" and entering the carriage which was waiting at the door, she went to take her drive in the Bois.

"Do you suppose that isn't exasperating?" said Fanny. "I have them on my back, either her or her mother, twice a week. The mother's even worse, more horrible looking. I must love you pretty well, you see, to stay on in this barrack.—Well, you're here at last, I have you once more! I was so afraid." And she held him in her arms a long while, standing, lips against lips, assuring herself by the quivering of the kiss that he was still all hers. But people were going and coming in the hall; they had to be on their guard. When they had brought the lamp, she seated herself in her usual place, a piece of needlework in her hands; he sat quite near her, as if making a call.

"Am I not changed, eh? This is not much like me, is it?"

She pointed with a smile to her needle, which she handled with the awkwardness of a little girl. She had always detested needlework; a book, her piano, her cigarette, or, with her sleeves rolled up, cooking some dainty little dish—she had never done any other work than that.

But what could she do here? She could not think of touching the piano in the salon, as she was obliged to stay in the office all day. Novels? She knew many more interesting stories than they had to tell. In default of the prohibited cigarette, she had taken up that piece of lace, which kept her fingers busy and left her free to think, and she understood now the taste of women for such trivial employments, which she formerly despised.

And while she dropped and picked up her stitches laughingly, with the attention of inexperience, Jean watched her, fresh and blooming in her simple dress, her straight, slender neck, her hair combed smooth on her graceful classic head, and such a sedate, virtuous air! Without, a constant stream of fasionable courtesans, amid luxurious surroundings, perched high in air on their phaetons, rolled down the avenue toward the noisy Paris of the boulevard; and Fanny seemed to feel no regret for that ostentatious, triumphant voice in which she might have taken her part, and which she had disdained for him. Provided that he agreed to see her from time to time, she gladly accepted her life of slavery, and even discovered an amusing side to it.

All the boarders adored her. The women, foreigners devoid of taste, consulted her before purchasing their dresses; she gave singing lessons in the morning to the oldest of the little Peruvians, and she gave advice, concerning books to read and plays to see, to the gentlemen who treated her with the utmost consideration and attention,—one in particular, the Dutchman on the second

floor. "He sits right where you are and gazes at me in rapt contemplation until I say to him, 'Kuyper, you annoy me.' Then he replies, 'Pien,' and goes away. It was he who gave me this little coral brooch. It's worth about a hundred *sous,* you see; I took it to avoid discussion."

A waiter entered, carrying a salver which he placed on the edge of the table, pushing back the plant a little way. "I eat here all by myself, an hour before the *table d'hôte.*" She selected two dishes from the long and varied menu. The manager was entitled to only two dishes and the soup. "She must be a stingy creature, that Rosario! However, I prefer to eat here; I don't have to talk, and I read over your letters, which are good company for me."

She interrupted herself again to procure a tablecloth and napkins; at every moment somebody called upon her: there were orders to give, a closet to be opened, a requisition to fill. Jean realized that he would be in her way if he remained longer; then, too, they were bringing in her dinner, and it was so pitiful, that little soup tureen with one portion smoking on the table, causing the same thought to pass through both their minds, the same regret for their former *tête-à-têtes!*

"Until Sunday, until Sunday," she murmured low, as she sent him away. And as they could not embrace because of the servants, the boarders going up and down the stairs, she took his hand and held it long against her heart, as if to force the caress in.

All the evening, all night he thought of her, suffering in her humiliating slavery to that trollop and her fat

lizard; then the Dutchman disturbed him also, and until Sunday he hardly lived. In reality that semi-rupture which was to pave the way without a shock for the end of their liaison, was to her the blow of the pruning-hook which gives renewed life to the exhausted tree. They wrote each other almost every day, such loving notes as are produced by the impatience of lovers; or else there was a pleasant chat in her office, after leaving the department, during her hour for needlework.

She had spoken of him in the house as "a relative of mine," and under cover of that vague description he could come occasionally and pass the evening in the salon, a thousand leagues from Paris. He knew the Peruvian family with its innumerable young ladies, decked out in dazzling colors, arranged around the salon for all the world like macaws on their perches; he listened to the zither of Mademoiselle Minna Vogel, begirt with flowers like a hoppole, and saw her sickly, voiceless brother passionately following the rhythm of the music with his head and running his fingers over an imaginary clarinet, the only kind he was allowed to play. He played whist with Fanny's Dutchman, a stout, bald-headed dolt, of miserly aspect, who had sailed over all the seas on the globe, and, when he was asked for some facts concerning Australia, where he had passed a number of months, replied, rolling his eyes, "Guess how much potatoes are in Melbourne?" for he had been impressed by that single fact and no other, the high price of potatoes in every country he visited.

Fanny was the soul of these occasions; she talked, sang,

played the well-informed and worldly Parisian; and such traces as her manners retained of Bohemia or of the studio either escaped the notice of those exotic creatures or seemed to them the acme of good form. She dazzled them with her intimate acquaintance with the famous names in art and literature, gave the Russian lady, who doted on Dejoie's works, interesting facts concerning the novelist's manner of writing, the number of cups of coffee he absorbed in one night, the exact figures of the ridiculous amount the publishers of *Cenderinette* had paid him for the book that made their fortunes. And his mistress's success made Gaussin so proud that he forgot to be jealous and would willingly have attested the truth of her words if anybody had cast a doubt upon them.

While he gazed admiringly at her in that peaceful salon lighted by shaded lamps, as she served the tea, played accompaniments for the young ladies or gave them advice like an older sister, there was a strange fascination for him in fancying her to himself in very different guise, when she would arrive at his house the following Sunday morning, drenched and shivering, and without even going near the fire, which was blazing in her honor, would hurriedly undress and creep into the great bed beside him. Then what embraces, what caresses, wherein the self-restraint of the whole week would have its revenge, the being deprived of each other which kept alive the passion of their love.

The hours would pass, would run together confusedly; they would not stir from the bed until night. There was

nothing to tempt them elsewhere; no entertainment, no one to see, not even the Hettémas, who had decided to live in the country for economy's sake. Their little lunch prepared beside the bed, they would listen, unheeding, to the uproar of the Parisian Sunday splashing through the street, the whistling of the locomotives, the rumbling of loaded cabs; and the rain falling in great drops on the zinc of the balcony, with the precipitate beating of their hearts, marked time for that absence of life, oblivious of the passing hours, until twilight.

Then the gas, lighted across the street, would cast a pale gleam on the hangings; they must rise and dress, as Fanny must be at home at seven. In the half-light of the bedroom, all her weariness, all her heart-sickness returned, heavier and more cruel than ever, as she put on her boots, still damp from her long walk, her skirts, her manager's dress, the black uniform of poor women.

And her chagrin was intensified by the things about her that she loved, the furniture, the little dressing-room of the happy days. She would tear herself away at last: "Let us go!" and, that they might remain together longer, Jean would accompany her; arm-in-arm they would walk slowly up Avenue de Champs-Elysées, where the double row of lamps, with the Arc de Triomphe rising out of the darkness in the distance, and two or three stars twinkling in a narrow bit of sky, counterfeited the background of a diorama. At the corner of Rue Pergolese, very near the lodging-house, she would raise her veil for a last kiss, and would leave him there bewildered, disgusted with his

apartments, to which he returned as late as possible, cursing poverty, and almost angry with the people at Castelet on account of the sacrifice he was making for them.

They dragged through two or three months of that existence, which at last became absolutely intolerable, as Jean had been obliged to make his visits less frequent because of the gossiping of servants, and Fanny was more and more exasperated by the avarice of the Sanchès family, mother and daughter. She thought in silence of setting up their little household anew, and felt that her lover too was nearing the end of his endurance, but she preferred that he should speak first.

One Sunday in April Fanny made her appearance dressed more elaborately than usual, in a round hat and a spring dress, very simple—they were not rich—but fitted perfectly to her graceful figure.

"Get up quickly; we are going to lunch in the country."

"In the country?"

"Yes, at Enghien, at Rosa's. She invites us both."

He said no at first, but she insisted. Rosa would never forgive a refusal. "You can afford to do it for my sake. It seems to me that I do enough."

It was on the shore of the lake at Enghien, with a broad lawn in front extending to a little inlet where several yawls and gondolas rocked at their moorings; a large chalet, beautifully decorated and furnished; the ceilings and glass panels reflecting the sparkling water and the magnificent tall hedges of a park already quivering with early verdure and lilacs in flower. The correct liveries,

the paths where not even a whisp of straw could be seen, did honor to the twofold superintendence of Rosario and old lady Pilar.

The house party were at table when they arrived, a false direction having caused them to go astray around the lake, through lanes between high garden walls. Jean's discomposure reached its climax at the cold reception accorded them by the mistress of the house, who was in a rage because they had kept her waiting, and at the extraordinary aspect of the old hags to whom Rosa presented him in her van-driver's voice. Three "élégantes," as the illustrious cocottes style one another, three antique strumpets, numbered among the glories of the Second Empire, with names as famous as that of a great poet or victorious general,—Wilkie Cob, Sombreuse, Clara Desfous.

"Elegant" they all were beyond question, tricked out in the latest style, charmingly dressed from collarette to boots; but so withered, painted, powdered! Sombreuse, with no eyelashes, lifeless eyes, nerveless lip, feeling around for her plate, her fork, her glass; La Desfous, enormously stout and bloated, with a hot-water bottle at her feet, displaying on the table-cloth her poor gouty, distorted fingers covered with gleaming rings as hard to put on and take off as the rings of a Roman puzzle. And Cob, very slender, with a youthful figure which added to the ghastliness of her fleshless face, like a sick clown's, beneath a mane of yellow tow. She, being utterly ruined, her property taken on execution, had gone to Monte-Carlo to try one last *coup* and had returned without a *sou,* mad

with love for a handsome croupier who would have none of her; Rosa, having taken her in, supported her and gloried in it.

All these women knew Fanny and welcomed her with a patronizing "How goes it, little one?" It is a fact that with her dress at three francs the yard and no ornaments save Kuyper's red brooch, she seemed like a raw recruit among those ghastly decorated veterans in harlotry, whom their luxurious surroundings, the light reflected from the lake and the sky, pouring in through the folding-doors of the drawing-room, mingled with the perfumes of spring, made more spectral than ever.

There was old Mère Pilar too, the *"chinge,"* as she called herself in her Franco-Spanish jargon, a genuine monkey with a dead rasping skin, her grinning features instinct with savage malice, her gray hair cut short around her ears like a boy's, and a broad blue sailor's collar over her old black satin.

"And Monsieur Bichito," said Rosa, when she had presented all her guests, calling Gaussin's attention to a bunch of pink cotton-wool on the table-cloth, on which the chameleon lay shivering.

"Well, where do I come in? Aren't you going to introduce me?" inquired, in a tone of forced joviality, a tall man with grizzly moustaches, correctly dressed, but perhaps a little stiff in his light waistcoat and high collar.

"True, true! Where does Tatave come in?" laughed the women. The mistress of the house carelessly pronounced his name.

Tatave was De Potter, the accomplished musician, the much applauded author of *Claudia* and *Savonarole;* and Jean, who had only caught a glimpse of him at Déchelette's, was astonished to find in the great artist such a lack of geniality, that stern, regular, wooden face, those dull eyes, putting the seal upon a mad, incurable passion which had bound him to that harridan for years, had made him leave wife and children to become a regular guest at that house, where he engulfed a part of his great fortune, his profits from the stage, and where he was treated with less consideration than a servant. You should have seen Rosa's bored expression as soon as he began to tell a story, and the contemptuous way in which she imposed silence upon him; and Pilar never failed to cap her daughter's reproof by adding in a tone of decision,—

"Just leave us alone, my boy."

Jean had old Pilar for a neighbor at table, and those flabby old lips, which mumbled as she ate with a noise like that made by an animal, that inquisitive inspection of his plate, were a perfect torment to the young man intensely annoyed as he was by Rosa's patronizing tone, her manner of joking Fanny about the musical evenings at the boarding-house, and the credulity of those poor fools of foreigners who took the manager for a society woman fallen upon evil days. The former "chariot lady," bloated with unhealthy fat, with a stone worth ten thousand francs at each ear, seemed to envy her friend the renewal of youth and beauty due to that young and handsome lover; and Fanny did not lose her temper; on the contrary, she enter-

tained the table, made fun of the boarders in true studio style, of the Peruvian, who, rolling his white eyes, confessed to her his desire to know a great *coucaute,* and the silent homage of the Dutchman puffing like a seal, and gasping behind her chair, "Guess how much potatoes are at Patavia?"

Gaussin, for his part, did not laugh; nor did Pilar, engrossed as she was in watching her daughter's silverware, or, if she spied a fly on the plate before her or on her neighbor's sleeve, leaning forward abruptly to present it, lisping tender phrases, "Eat it, *mi alma, mi corazon,*" to the hideous little beast which had tumbled on to the cloth, a flabby, wrinkled, shapeless mass, like La Desfous' fingers.

Sometimes, when all the flies were in retreat, she would spy one on the sideboard or the glass door, whereupon she would leave her seat and triumphantly capture it. That manœuvre, repeated many times, irritated her daughter, who was certainly very nervous that morning.

"Don't keep getting up every minute; it's tiresome."

In the same voice, two tones lower in the scale of jargon, the mother replied,—

"You people eat; why don't you want him to eat too?"

"Leave the table or keep still; you annoy us."

The old woman answered back, and they began to abuse each other like the pious Spaniards they were, mingling heaven and hell with blackguardisms of the gutter.

"Hija del demonio!"

"Cuerno de Satanas!"

"Puta!"

"Mi Madre!"

Jean stared at them in dismay, while the other guests, accustomed to these domestic episodes, continued to eat tranquilly. De Potter alone intervened, out of regard for the stranger,—

"Come, come, pray don't quarrel."

But Rosa turned furiously upon him: "Why do you thrust your nose in? Fine manners, indeed! Ain't I free to speak? Just go to your wife and see whether I am or not! I've had enough of your fried perch's eyes and the three hairs you've got left. Go and take them to your old turkey; it's high time!"

De Potter smiled, his face a little pale.

"And I must live with this creature!" he muttered in his moustache.

"This creature's quite as good as that one!" she roared, her whole body almost on the table. "And the door's open, you know; off with you—skip!"

"Come, come, Rosa," the poor dull eyes implored. And Mère Pilar, beginning to eat once more, said with such comical phlegm: "Just leave us alone, my boy!" that the whole table roared with laughter, even Rosa, even De Potter, who kissed his still grumbling mistress, and to earn his pardon more fully, caught a fly, and presented it delicately, by the wings, to Bichito.

And that was De Potter, the illustrious composer, the pride of the French school! How did she retain her hold

upon him, by what witchcraft,—that creature grown old in vice, vulgar beyond words, with that mother who made her twice as disgusting as she naturally was, by exhibiting her as she would be twenty years later, as if reflected in a silver ball?

Coffee was served on the shore of the lake, in a little rock-work grotto, lined with light silks, which reflected the changing surface of the water,—one of those delicious nests for kissing invented by the story-tellers of the eighteenth century, with a mirror in the ceiling which reflected the attitudes of the old harridans sprawling over the broad couch in a digestive torpor, and Rosa, her cheeks aflame under the paint, stretching back against her musician.

"O my Tatave! my Tatave!"

But that affectionate warmth evaporated with the warmth of the Chartreuse; and one of the ladies having suggested a row on the lake, she sent De Potter to prepare the boat.

"The skiff, you understand, not the Norwegian boat."

"Suppose I tell Désiré—"

"Désiré's at breakfast."

"The skiff is full of water; we shall have to bail her out and that's a day's work."

"Jean will go with you, De Potter," said Fanny, who saw that another scene was imminent.

Sitting opposite each other, with legs apart, each on a thwart, they bailed energetically, without looking at each other, without speaking, as if hypnotized by the rhythm of

the water gushing from the two dippers. The shadow of a great catalpa fell in perfumed coolness about them, sharply outlined against the resplendent brightness of the lake.

"Have you been with Fanny long?" the musician suddenly asked, pausing in his work.

"Two years," replied Gaussin, somewhat surprised.

"Only two years! In that case what you see to-day may perhaps be of service to you. It is twenty years since I went to live with Rosa,—twenty years since, on my return from Italy after my three years' incumbency of the *prix de Rome,* I went into the Hippodrome one evening and saw her standing in her little chariot, coming down on me round the turn in the ring, whip in air, with her helmet with eight lanceheads, and her coat covered with gold scales fitting tight to her figure to the middle of her leg. Ah! if any one had told me—"

Plying his dipper once more, he told him how at first his people had simply laughed at the liaison; then, when the matter became serious, to what efforts, what entreaties, what sacrifices, his parents had had recourse in order to break it off. Two or three times the girl had been bribed to leave him, but he always joined her again. "Let us try traveling," his mother had said. He traveled, returned, and took up with her again. Then he had consented to marry; a pretty girl, a handsome dowry, and the promise of the Institute for a wedding present. And three months later he left the new establishment for the old one. "Ah! young man! young man!"

He told the story of his life in a passionless voice, without moving a muscle in his face, as rigid as the starched collar that held his head so straight. And boats passed, laden with students and girls, overflowing with song and with the laughter of youth and excitement; how many among those heedless ones might profitably have stopped and taken their share of the lesson!

In the kiosk, meanwhile, as if the word had been passed to bring about a rupture, the old *élégantes* were preaching common-sense to Fanny Legrand. Her little one was pretty to look at, but not a *sou;* what would that bring her to?

"But so long as I love him!"

And Rosa observed with a shrug: "Let her alone; she's going to miss her Dutchman, as I've seen her miss all her fine chances. After her affair with Flamant, however, she did try to become practical, but here she is crazier than ever."

"Ay! vellaca!" grumbled Mamma Pilar.

The Englishwoman with the clown's face intervened with the horrible accent to which she owed her long-continued vogue:—

"It was all very well to love love, little one,—love was a very good thing, you know,—but you ought to love money too. Take me, for instance, if I had still been rich, do you suppose my croupier'd have called me ugly, eh?" She jumped up and down in a frenzy and raised her voice to its shrillest pitch: "Oh! but that was terrible. To have been famous in the world, known everywhere like a

monument or a boulevard, so well known that you couldn't find a miserable cabman who wouldn't know at once where to go when you said, 'Wilkie Cob!' To have had princes to put my feet on, and kings, when I spit, say that it was pretty! And then to think of that filthy cur who wouldn't have me because I was ugly; and I didn't have enough to buy him for just one night."

And waxing excited at the idea that she should have been called ugly, she abruptly opened her dress.

"The face, yes, I sacrificed that; but the breast and shoulder,—are they white? are they firm and hard?"

She shamelessly displayed her witch's flesh, which had retained its youth to a miraculous degree after thirty years in the furnace, and over which lowered her face, withered and deadly from the line of the neck upwards.

"The boat is ready, mesdames!" called De Potter; and the Englishwoman, fastening her dress over what remained to her of youth, murmured in comical dismay,—

"I couldn't go half-dressed to public places, you see."

What an embarkation that was of all those superannuated old Cythereans, in that landscape worthy of Lancret, where the dainty white villas stood out among the new verdure, with the terraces and lawns framing that little lake gleaming as with scales in the sunlight,—blind Sombreuse and the old clown and Desfous, the paralytic, leaving in the wake of the boat the musky odor of their paint!

Jean plied the oars, bending his back to the task, ashamed and in despair at the thought that some one might see him and impute to him some degrading func-

tion in that ill-omened allegorical craft. Luckily, he had facing him, to refresh his heart and eyes, Fanny Legrand, who sat in the stern, near the tiller held by De Potter,—Fanny, whose smile had never seemed to him so youthful, by reason of the contrast, doubtless.

"Sing us something, little one," said La Desfous, softened by the spring weather. In her deep, expressive voice Fanny began the barcarolle from *Claudia,* while the musician, moved by that reminder of his first great success, hummed with his mouth closed the orchestral accompaniment, those undulating measures, which flit about the melody like a gleam of dancing water. At that hour, in that lovely spot, it was delicious. Some one cried *bravo!* from a terrace near by; and the Provençal, keeping time with his oars, felt a thirst for that divine music from his mistress's lips, a temptation to put his mouth to the spring itself, and to drink in the sunlight, with his head thrown back forever.

Suddenly Rosa in a savage tone interrupted the singing, irritated by the union of the two voices: "I say there, give us some music when you have done cooing into each other's faces. Do you fancy that that funereal stuff amuses us! We've had enough of it; in the first place it's late, and Fanny must go back to her box."

With an angry gesture she pointed to the nearest pier.

"Steer in there," she said to her lover; "they'll be nearer the station."

It was a brutal sort of dismissal; but the ex-lady of the chariot had accustomed her intimates to her methods of

procedure, and no one dared protest. The couple being landed on the shore with a few words of frigid politeness to the young man, and orders to Fanny in a shrill voice, the boat moved away laden with outcries and with a bitter altercation, terminated by an insulting burst of laughter borne to the lover's ears by the resonance of the water.

"You hear, you hear," said Fanny, livid with rage; "she is making sport of us!"

All her humiliation, all the rankling insults inflicted upon her, recurred to her mind at that last affront, and she enumerated them as they returned to the station, even admitted some things that she had always concealed. Rosa's whole object was to part her from him, to afford her opportunities to deceive him. "When I think of all she has said to me to make me take up with that Dutchman! Just now again they all went at me. I love you too well, you see; it bothers her in her vices, for she has them all, the vilest, the most monstrous."

She checked herself, seeing that he was very pale, that his lips were trembling as on the evening when he stirred the dunghill of letters.

"Oh! have no fear," she said; "your love has cured me of all those horrors. She and her pestiferous chameleon are equally disgusting to me."

"I don't want you to stay there," said the lover, agitated by unhealthy jealousy. "There is too much filth in the bread you earn; you must go home with me; we will pull through somehow."

She expected that cry, had been trying for a long time

to call it forth. And yet she resisted, objecting that it would be very hard to keep house with the three hundred francs from the department, and that they would perhaps have to separate again. "And I suffered so when I left our poor little house!"

Benches were placed at intervals under the acacias which lined the road, with telegraph wires covered with swallows; to talk more at ease, they sat down, both deeply moved, and arm in arm.

"Three hundred francs a month," said Jean; "why, what do the Hettémas do, who have only two hundred and fifty?"

"They live in the country at Chaville, all the year round."

"Well, let's do as they do; I do not care for Paris."

"Really? do you really mean it? oh, my dear! my dear!"

People were passing along the road, a galloping line of asses carrying the débris of a wedding-party. They could not embrace, and they sat motionless, very close together, dreaming of a rejuvenated happiness on summer evenings in the country, sweet with that same perfume of green fields, tranquil and warm, and enlivened by carbine-shots in the distance and by the barrel-organ tunes of a suburban fête.

VIII

They settled at Chaville, between the upper and the lower town, along that old forest road called the Pavé des Gardes, in an old hunting-box at the entrance to the woods: three rooms hardly larger than those in Paris, and the same furniture, the cane-seated chair, the painted wardrobe, and to adorn the horrible green paper in their bedroom, nothing but Fanny's portrait, for the photograph of Castelet had its frame broken in moving and was fading away in the lumber-room.

They hardly mentioned poor Castelet now, since the uncle and niece had broken off their correspondence.

"A pretty kind of a friend!" she said, remembering Le Fénat's readiness to promote the first rupture. Only the little girls kept their brother informed of the news, for Divonne had ceased to write. Perhaps she still entertained a grudge against her nephew; or did she guess that the bad woman had returned, to unseal, and criticize her poor, motherly letters in the coarse peasant handwriting.

At times they might have believed that they were still on Rue d'Amsterdam, when they were awakened by the singing of the Hettémas, once more their neighbors, and the whistling of the locomotives passing constantly in both directions on the other side of the road, and visible through the trees of a large park. But instead of the murky

glass walls of the great Western station, its curtainless windows, through which could be seen the silhouettes of clerks bending over their work, and the roar and rumble of the sloping street, they enjoyed the silent, green space beyond their little orchard, surrounded by other gardens, by villas in clumps of trees, sliding down to the foot of the hill.

Before starting for Paris in the morning, Jean breakfasted in their little dining-room, with the window open on the broad paved road, grass-grown in spots, and lined by rows of white thorn with its pungent perfume. That road took him to the station in ten minutes, skirting the rustling, chirping park; and when he returned, those sounds grew fainter as the shadows crept out of the thickets to the moss in the green road, empurpled by the rays of the setting sun, and as the calls of the cuckoos in every corner of the wood blended with the trills of the nightingale among the ivy.

But as soon as they were fairly settled, and his surprise at the unaccustomed tranquillity of his surroundings had subsided, the lover fell a victim anew to the torments of a sterile and prying jealousy. His mistress's rupture with Rosa and her departure from the lodging-house had led to an appalling explanation between the two women, full of ambiguous insinuations, which revived his suspicions, his most disturbing anxieties; and when he went away, when he looked out from the train at their little low house, with just a ground-floor surmounted by a round attic window, his glance seemed to pierce the wall. He

would say to himself, "Who knows?" and the thought haunted him even among the papers on his desk.

When he returned at night, he made her give him an account of her day, of her most trivial acts, of her thoughts, generally most uninteresting, which he tried to surprise with a "What are you thinking about? tell me, quick," always fearing that she regretted something or some one in that horrible past, admitted by her every time with the same imperturbable frankness.

When they met only on Sundays and were thirsty for each other, he did not waste time in these insulting and minute searchings of the mind. But now that they were together once more, with no break in their life *à deux*, they tormented each other even in their caresses, in their most secret communing, excited by the dull wrath, the painful consciousness, of the irreparable.

Then, too, their energies seemed to relax, perhaps it was satiety of the senses in the warm envelopment of nature, or more simply the proximity of the Hettémas. Of all the households encamped in the suburbs of Paris, not one perhaps ever enjoyed the freedom of life in the country as that one did,—the delight of going about clad in rags, in hats made of bark, Madame without corsets, Monsieur in canvas shoes; of carrying crusts from the table for the ducks, scrapings for the rabbits; and hoeing and raking and planting and watering.

Oh, that watering!

The Hettémas set about it as soon as the husband, after returning from the office, had exchanged his office coat

for a Robinson Crusoe jacket; after dinner they went at it again, and long after nightfall, in the little dark garden, from which a fresh smell of damp earth arose, could be heard the creaking of the pump, the colliding of the great watering-pots, and elephantine gasps wandering among the flower-beds, with a splashing which seemed to be caused by water falling from the toilers' brows into their watering-pots, and from time to time a triumphant exclamation:—"I've put thirty-two pots on the marrowfat peas!"

"And I fourteen on the balsams!"

They were people who were not content to be happy, but gloated over their own happiness and relished it in a way to make your mouth water; especially the man, by the irresistible way in which he described the joys of their household in winter.

"It's nothing now, but just wait till December, then you'll see! You come home wet and muddy, with all the vexations of Paris on your back; you find a good fire, a bright lamp, the soup smoking on the table, and under the table a pair of clogs filled with straw. Ah! when you've stowed away a dish of sausages and cabbage with a slice of gruyère kept fresh under a cloth, and when you've poured on it a glass of wine that never saw Bercy, free of christening and duty, how pleasant it is to draw your armchair up to the fire, light a pipe while you drink your coffee laced with a drop of brandy, and take a little snooze opposite each other, while the ice melts on the windows! Just a bit of a nap, you know, long enough for the heavy part of the

digestion. Then you draw a few minutes, the wife clears the table, hustles about fixing the bedclothes and the hot-water bottle; and when she's gone to bed and the place is warm, in you jump, and you feel a warmth all over your body just as if you'd crawled into the straw in your shoes."

He waxed almost eloquent over his material joys, the hairy, heavy-jawed giant, on ordinary occasions so shy that he could not say two words without blushing and stammering.

That absurd shyness, which contrasted so comically with his black beard and colossal frame, was responsible for his marriage and his tranquil life. Hettéma at twenty-five, overflowing with lusty health, knew nothing of love or women; but one day at Nevers, after a corps dinner, some of his comrades enticed him, half-tipsy, to a house of prostitution and forced him to choose one of the inmates. He left the place in the utmost bewilderment, went there again and again, always chose the same one, paid her debts, took her away, and, taking fright at the idea that some one might steal her from him, so that he would have to begin a fresh conquest, he ended by marrying her.

"A legitimate household, my dear," said Fanny, with a triumphant laugh, to Jean, who listened to her in dismay. "And it is the cleanest and most virtuous of all of that kind I have ever known."

She affirmed it in the sincerity of her ignorance, for the legitimate households to which she had been admitted doubtless deserved no kinder judgment; and all her ideas of life were as sincere and as false as that.

As neighbors these Hettémas had a calming effect, being always good-humored, capable of rendering services that were not too burdensome, and having an especial horror of scenes, of quarrels in which they must take part, and in general of anything calculated to interfere with a peaceful digestion. The wife tried to initiate Fanny in the science of raising chickens and rabbits, in the salubrious delights of watering, but in vain.

Gaussin's mistress, a child of the faubourg and graduate of studios, did not like the country except in snatches, on picnics, as a place where one can shout and roll on the grass and lose oneself with one's lover. She detested effort and labor, and as her six months' experience as manager had exhausted her power of energy for a long while, she sank into a dreamy torpor, a drunkenness of comfort and fresh air, which almost left her without strength to dress, to arrange her hair, or even to open her piano.

The cares of housekeeping being confided entirely to a country-woman, when, at night, she reviewed her day in order to describe it to Jean, she could think of nothing but a visit to Olympe, gossip over the wall, and cigarettes, heaps of cigarettes, the remains of which disfigured the marble mantel. Six o'clock already! Barely time to slip on a dress and pin a flower in her waist to go and meet him on the grass-grown road.

But with the coming of the fogs and rains of autumn, and night falling so early, she had more than one excuse for not going out; and he frequently surprised her on his return in one of the white woollen *gandouras* with broad

pleats, which she put on in the morning, and with her hair twisted in a knot as when he went away. He thought her charming so, with her still youthful flesh, well kept and tempting, which was ready to his hand, with nothing in the way. And yet the lack of energy offended him, alarmed him as a source of danger.

He himself, after a tremendous effort to increase their resources a little without having recourse to Castelet, after passing nights over plans, reproductions of pieces of artillery, caissons, muskets of a new pattern, which he designed for Hettéma, was assailed by the enervating influence of the country and of solitude, by which the strongest and most energetic allow themselves to be overcome, its benumbing seed having been implanted in him by his early childhood in an out-of-the-way corner.

And the materiality of their stout neighbors assisted in the process, infecting them, in the endless going and coming from one house to the other, with a little of their mental degradation and their abnormal appetite. Gaussin and his mistress also reached the point of discussing the question of meals and bedtime. Césaire having sent a cask of his "frog's wine," they passed a whole Sunday bottling it, with the door of their little cellar open to the last sun of the year, a blue sky flecked with pink clouds, of the shade of wood-heather. They were not far away from the period of clogs filled with warm straw and the after-dinner nap. Luckily something occurred to divert their thoughts.

He found her one evening highly excited. Olympe had been telling her the story of a little boy, brought up by a

grandmother in Morvan. The father and mother, dealers in wood in Paris, had not written or paid any money for months. The grandmother having died suddenly, some bargemen had brought the urchin through the Yonne Canal to turn him over to his parents; but they could not find any one. The wood-yard closed, the mother gone off with a lover, the father became a drunkard, a bankrupt, disappeared! Fine things, these lawful households! And there was the little fellow, six years old, a perfect love, without bread or clothes, in the gutter!

She was moved almost to tears, then said abruptly,—

"Suppose we should take him? Are you willing?"

"What madness!"

"Why so?" And nestling close to him, she continued coaxingly: "You know how I have longed for a child by you; we could bring this one up, give him an education. After a while you love the little ones you pick up in the street as dearly as if they were your own."

She also reminded him what a source of distraction it would be to her, alone as she was all day, growing stupid by dint of overhauling heaps of unpleasant thoughts. A child is a safeguard. Then, when she saw that he had taken fright at the expense: "Why, the expense is nothing. Just think, six years old! we will dress him with your old clothes. Olympe, who knows what she's talking about, assures me that we should never notice it."

"Why doesn't she take him, then?" said Jean, with the testiness of a man who feels that he is vanquished by his own weakness. He tried to resist, however, resorting to the

convincing argument: "And when I am no longer here, what will happen?" He rarely mentioned his departure, in order not to sadden Fanny, but he thought of it, and was reassured by the thought against the dangers of his present mode of life and De Potter's melancholy confidences. "What a complication the child will cause, what a burden he will be to you in the future!"

Fanny's eyes grew dim.

"You are mistaken, my dear; he will be some one to talk to about you, a consolation, a responsibility too, which will give me strength to work, to retain a desire to live."

He reflected a moment, imagined her all alone, in the empty house.

"Where is this little fellow?"

"At Bas-Meudon, with a bargeman who has taken him in for a few days. After that it's the hospital, the almshouse."

"Well, go and get him, as your heart is set on it."

She threw her arms around his neck, and all the evening, as joyous as a child, she played, and sang, happy, exuberant, transfigured. The next morning, in the train, Jean mentioned their decision to Hettéma, who seemed to know about the episode, but to be determined to have no hand in it. Buried in his corner reading the *Petit Journal,* he muttered in the depths of his beard,—

"Yes, I know—the women did it—it's none of my business. Your wife seems to me to be very romantic," he added, showing his face above the paper.

Romantic or not, she was dismayed beyond measure that evening, as she knelt on the floor, a plate of soup in her hand, trying to tame the little fellow from Morvan, who stood against the wall in a shrinking attitude, his head hanging down,—an enormous head with flaxen hair, —and energetically refused to talk, to eat, even to show his face, but repeated again and again in a loud, choking, monotonous voice,—

"See Ménine, see Ménine."

"Ménine was his grandmother, I imagine. Since two o'clock I haven't been able to get anything else out of him."

Jean took a hand in trying to make him swallow his soup, but without avail. And there they remained, kneeling so that their faces were on a level with his, one holding the plate, the other the spoon, as if he were a sick lamb, trying to move him by encouraging, affectionate words.

"Let us go to dinner; perhaps we frighten him; he will eat if we stop looking at him."

But he continued to stand there, wild as a hawk, repeating like a little savage his wailing "See Ménine," which tore their hearts, until he fell asleep leaning against the sideboard,—such a deep sleep that they were able to undress him and lay him in the rough, rustic cradle borrowed from a neighbor, without his opening his eyes for a second.

"See how handsome he is!" said Fanny, very proud of her acquisition; and she compelled Gaussin to admire

that willful brow, those refined and delicate features beneath the sunburn of the fields, that perfect little body with the well-knit loins, the full arms, the legs like a young satyr's, already covered with down below the knee. She forgot herself gazing at that childish beauty.

"Cover him up; he'll be cold," said Jean, whose voice made her start, as if awakened from a dream; and as she carefully tucked him in, the little one drew several long sobbing breaths, as if struggling in a sea of despair, notwithstanding his sleep.

In the night he began to talk of his own accord:

"*Guerlande* me, Ménine."

"What does he say? listen."

He wanted to be *guerlanded;* but what did that patois word mean? Jean at all hazards put out his arm and began to rock the heavy cradle; gradually the child became quieter and fell asleep holding in his chubby little hand the hand which he believed to be his "Ménine's," who had been dead a fortnight.

He was like a little wild cat in the house, clawing and biting, eating apart from the others, and growling when any one approached his bowl; the few words that they extorted from him were in the barbarous dialect of Morvan wood-cutters, which no one could ever have understood without the aid of the Hettémas, who were from the same province as he. However, by dint of constant attention and gentleness they succeeded in taming him a little *"un pso,"* as he said. He consented to exchange the rags he wore when he arrived for the neat warm clothes, the sight

of which, at first made him tremble with rage as a jackal would, if one should try to dress him in a greyhound's coat. He learned to eat at the table, to use a fork and spoon, and to answer, when any one asked him his name, that in the country "i li dision Josaph."[1]

As for giving him the slightest elementary notions in the way of education, they could not think of that as yet. Brought up in the midst of the woods, in a charcoal-burner's hut, the murmur of rustling, swarming nature haunted his tough little rustic's pate as the sound of the sea rings in the spiral folds of a shell; and there was no way of forcing anything else into it, nor of keeping him in the house even in the most severe weather. In the rain and the snow, when the bare trees stood like columns of frosts, he would slip out of the house, prowl among the bushes, search the holes and burrows with the ingenious cruelty of a ferret, and when he returned home, in a state of collapse from hunger, he always had in his torn fustian jacket, or in the pockets of his little breeches, covered with mud to his waist, some stunned or dead creature, a bird or mole or field-mouse, or, in its place, potatoes or beets he had dug in the fields.

Nothing could overcome those poaching, marauding instincts, coupled with a peasant's mania for stowing away all sorts of glittering trifles, copper buttons, bits of jet, tinfoil, which he would pick up, hiding them in his hand, and carry them off to hiding-places worthy of a thieving magpie. All this booty was included by him in a vague,

[1] They called him Josaph.

generic name, "the harvest" (*la denrée*), which he pronounced denraie; and neither arguments nor blows would have deterred him from making his *denraie* at the expense of everybody and everything.

Only the Hettémas could keep him in order, the draughtsman keeping always within reach, on the table around which the little savage prowled, attracted by the compasses and colored pencils, a dog-whip which he cracked about his legs. But neither Jean nor Fanny would resort to such threats, although the little one, in his dealings with them, was sly, suspicious, untamable even by the most affectionate cajolery, as if *Ménine,* when she died, had deprived him of all power of affection. Fanny sometimes succeeded in keeping him for a moment on her knees, "because she smelt good;" but to Gaussin, although he was very gentle with him, he was always the wild beast of the first night, with the same suspicious glance and outstretched claws.

That unconquerable, almost instinctive repulsion on the child's part, the inquisitive, mischievous expression of his little blue eyes, with their Albino-like lashes, and, above all, Fanny's sudden and blind affection for the little stranger who had suddenly fallen into their lives, tormented the lover with a new suspicion. Perhaps he was her own child, brought up by a nurse or by her stepmother; and Machaume's death, of which they learned about that time, was a coincidence that seemed to justify his suspicions. Sometimes at night, when he held that little hand, which clung tightly to his,—for the child in

the vague land of dreams always thought that *Ménine* was holding it,—he questioned him with all his inward, unacknowledged unrest: "Where do you come from? Who are you?" hoping that the mystery of the little fellow's birth might be made known to him through contact with his warm flesh.

But his anxiety vanished at a word from Père Legrand, who came to ask for assistance in paying for a fence around his deceased helpmeet's grave, and called out to his daughter when he saw Josaph's cradle:—

"Hallo! a kid! you must be pleased, when you've never been able to raise one."

Gaussin was so happy that he paid for the fence without even asking to see the plans, and kept Père Legrand to breakfast.

The old cabman, now employed on the tramway between Paris and Versailles, his face flushed with wine and apoplexy, but still lusty and active under his glazed leather hat, surrounded for the occasion by a heavy *crêpe* band, which made it a genuine "mute's" hat,—the old cabman seemed delighted by his reception at the hands of his daughter's *gentleman,* and came again at intervals, to break bread with them. His white hair *à la* Mr. Punch, surrounding his shaven, bloated face, his majestic, tipsy air, the respect with which he treated his whip, leaning it against the wall in a safe corner with the precautions of a nurse, made a deep impression on the child; and the old man and he at once became very intimate. One day, just

as they had finished dining together, the Hettémas surprised them.

"Oh! excuse us, you are having a family party," said Madame, in a mincing tone, and the words struck Jean in the face as humiliating as a blow.

His family! That foundling who was snoring with his head on the cloth, that weather-beaten old pirate, with his pipe stuck in the corner of his mouth and the voice of a fishwife, explaining for the hundredth time that two *sous'* worth of whipcord would last him six months, and that he hadn't changed his handle for twenty years! His family, nonsense! they were no more his family than she was his wife, that Fanny Legrand, that played out, prematurely old creature, leaning on her elbows amid the cigarette smoke. Within a year it would all have disappeared from his life, leaving only the vague memory of traveling acquaintances or a neighbor *table d'hôte.*

But at other times that thought of approaching departure, which he invoked as an excuse for his weakness when he felt that he was falling, being dragged lower and lower, that idea, instead of comforting him, of encouraging him, caused him to feel more keenly the manifold bonds that held him fast to realize what a wrench that departure would be, not one rupture, but ten ruptures, and that it would cost him dearly to let go that little child's hand, which rested freely in his at night. Even La Balue, the golden thrush who sang and whistled in his too small cage, which they were always going to change,

and in which he was forced to stoop, like the old cardinal in his iron cage,—yes, even La Balue had taken possession of a small corner of his heart, and it would hurt to cast him out.

And yet that inevitable separation was drawing nigh; and the gorgeous month of June, which arrayed all nature in festal garb, would probably be the last they would pass together. Was it that that made her nervous and irritable, or was it the burden of Josaph's education, which she had undertaken with sudden ardor, to the intense disgust of the little Morvandian, who sat for hours staring at his letters without seeing or pronouncing them, his forehead locked with a bar like the wings of a farmyard gate? From day to day her woman's nature found vent in violent outbursts and in tears, in constantly recurring scenes, although Gaussin exerted himself to be indulgent; but she was so insulting, her wrath exhaled such reeking fumes of malice and hatred against her lover's youth, his education, his family, the gulf between their two destinies, which fate was about to widen, she was so skillful in touching him on the sensitive spots, that he finally lost his temper too, and answered her.

But his wrath maintained the reserve, the compassion of a man of good breeding, refrained from dealing blows which he deemed too painful and too easily dealt, whereas she gave free rein to the blind rage of a prostitute, devoid of responsibility or shame, made a weapon of everything, watched with cruel joy on her victim's face the contrac-

tion of pain which she caused, then suddenly threw herself into his arms and besought his forgiveness.

The faces of the Hettémas, when they were present at these quarrels, which almost always broke out at the table, just as they were seated and ready to remove the lid of the soup tureen or plunge the knife into the joint, were a study for a painter. They would exchange a glance of comical dismay across the table. Might they venture to eat, or was the leg of mutton about to fly away through the garden with the platter, the gravy, and the stewed beans?

"On condition that there's to be no scene!" they would say whenever there was a suggestion of a reunion of the families; and that was the remark with which they greeted a project for breakfasting together in the forest, which Fanny threw at them over the wall one Sunday. Oh, no! they would not quarrel to-day; it was too fine! And she ran to dress the child and pack the baskets.

Everything was ready, and they were about to start when the postman brought a stout letter for which Gaussin had to sign a receipt, so that he was detained. He overtook the party at the entrance to the woods, and said to Fanny in an undertone,—

"It's from my uncle. He is wild with delight. A superb crop, sold as it stands. He sends back Déchelette's eight thousand francs, with many thanks and compliments for his niece."

"His niece, oh, yes! *à la mode de Gascogne.* The old

wretch!" said Fanny, who had lost all her illusions concerning uncles from the South. In a moment she added, with joyful satisfaction: "We shall have to invest that money."

He gazed at her in blank amazement, because he had found her always very scrupulous in money matters.

"Invest? why, it isn't yours."

"Well, you see, I never told you—" with the glance which lost its sparkle at the slightest departure from the truth; Déchelette, like the good fellow he was, having heard what they were doing for Josaph, had written her that that money would help them to bring up the little one. "But you know, if it annoys you, we'll send back his eight thousand francs; he's in Paris."

The voice of Hettéma, who had discreetly gone on ahead with his wife, echoed through the trees:

"To the right or left?"

"To the right, to the right—to the Ponds!" cried Fanny; then, turning to her lover: "Come, come, you're not going to begin to eat your heart out over trifles; we're an old couple, deuce take it!"

She knew that trembling pallor of the lips, that glance at the boy, interrogating him from head to foot; but this time there was only a momentary thrill of jealousy. He had reached now the stage of acting the coward from habit, of conceding anything for the sake of peace. "What is the need of tormenting myself, of going to the bottom of things? If this child is hers, what more natural than that she should take him in and conceal the truth from me

after all the scenes, all the questionings, I have forced her to submit to! Isn't it better to take things as they are and pass the few remaining months in peace?"

And he plodded along the forest roads through the valley, carrying their picnic luncheon in its heavy basket covered with white cloth, resigned to his fate, his back bent like an aged gardener's, while the mother and child walked together in front of him, Josaph resplendent and awkward in a complete outfit from the *Belle-Jardinière,* which made it impossible for him to run, she in a light *peignoir,* her head and neck bare under a Japanese parasol, her waist less sylph-like than of yore, indolent of gait, and in her lovely twisted hair a broad white streak which she no longer took the trouble to conceal.

In front of them, and farther down the sloping path, the Hettéma couple, in gigantic straw hats like those of the Touarez horsemen, dressed in red flannel and laden with provisions, fishing tackle, nets, crab-spears; and the wife, to lighten her husband's burden, gallantly wearing saltire-wise across her colossal breast the hunting-horn without which the draughtsman could not be induced to walk in the forest. As they walked, they sang:

"J'aime entendre la rame
Le soir battre les flots;
J'aime le cerf qui brame—" [1]

Olympe's repertory of those sentimental curbstone dities was inexhaustible; and when one considered where

[1] I love to hear the oar
Beating the waves at night;
I love the braying stag—

she had picked them up, in the degrading half-light behind closed blinds, and to how many men she had sung them, the husband's serenity as he sang a second to them assumed extraordinarily grand proportions. The remark of the grenadier at Waterloo, "There are too many of them," must have been the key to that man's philosophical indifference.

While Gaussin musingly watched the huge couple plunge into a hollow, whither he followed them at a short distance, a creaking of wheels came up the path with a volley of hearty laughter and childish voices; and suddenly, a few steps away, a wagon-load of little girls, ribbons, and waving hair appeared, in an English cart drawn by a little donkey, with a young girl, hardly older than the others, leading him by the bridle over that rough road.

It was easy to see that Jean belonged to the party whose heterodox costumes, especially that of the fat woman with a hunting-horn slung over her shoulder, had excited the young people to inextinguishable laughter; and the older girl tried to impose silence on them for a moment. But that other Touarez hat called forth a still louder burst of mocking laughter; and as she passed the man who stood aside to make room for the little cart, a pretty smile tinged with embarrassment asked his pardon, and expressed naïve surprise to find that the old gardener's face was youthful and attractive.

He bowed timidly, blushed with no very clear idea as to what he was ashamed of; and as the cart stopped at the

top of the hill at a cross-road, and a babel of little voices read aloud the names on the sign-post, half-effaced by the rain, "Road to the Ponds," "The Grand Huntsman's Oak," "False Repose," "Road to Vélizy," Jean turned and watched them disappear in the green path flecked with sunlight and carpeted with moss, where the wheels rolled as on velvet,—a whirlwind of fair-haired childhood, a wagon-load of happiness arrayed in the colors of spring, with laughter exploding like fireworks under the branches.

A fierce blast on Hettéma's bugle roused him abruptly from his reverie. They had established themselves on the shore of the pond and were unpacking the provisions; and from a distance one could see in the water the reflection of the white cloth spread on the short grass, and of the red flannel jackets standing out amid the verdure like a huntsman's pink coat.

"Come, hurry up! you have the lobster!" cried the fat man; and Fanny's nervous voice added,—

"Was it little Bouchereau who stopped you on the road?"

Jean started at the name of Bouchereau, which carried him back to Castelet, to his sick mother's bedside.

"Yes," said the draughtsman, taking the basket from his hands; "the tall one, the one leading the pony, is the doctor's niece. A daughter of his brother, whom he has taken into his family. They live at Vélizy in summer. She's a pretty girl."

"Oh! very pretty,—especially that brazen-faced air."

And Fanny as she cut the bread, watched her lover, disturbed by the far-away look in his eyes.

Madame Hettéma, unpacking the ham the while, solemnly expressed her disapprobation of that fashion of allowing young girls to roam about the woods at will. "You will tell me that it's the English way, and that she was brought up in London; but that doesn't make any difference, it really isn't proper."

"No, but very convenient for adventures."

"Oh! Fanny——"

"Excuse me, I forgot; Monsieur believes in innocent girls."

"Come, come, suppose we have our luncheon," said Hettéma, beginning to take alarm. But Fanny must needs tell all she knew about young girls in society. She had some fine stories on that subject; convents, boarding-schools, were the scenes of them. Girls left those establishments worn out, withered, disgusted with men, not even capable of having children. "And then they give them to you, you dupes! An *ingénue!* As if there was any such thing as an *ingénue!* as if all girls, in society or not in society, didn't know from their birth what's what. I myself had nothing to learn when I was twelve years old; nor had you, Olympe, eh?"

"Of course not," said Madame Hettéma, with a shrug; but the fate of the luncheon engrossed her attention when she heard Gaussin, whose temper was rising, declare that there were girls and girls, and that one could still find in some families——

"Oh! yes, families," retorted his mistress, scornfully, "I like to hear you talk about families; especially your own."

"Hush! I forbid you——"

"Bourgeois!"

"Wretch. Luckily this will soon end. I haven't much longer to live with you."

"Go, go! clear out! I shall be glad enough."

They were hurling insults at each other's heads, before the maliciously inquisitive child, who lay face downward in the grass, when a terrible blast from the bugle, repeated in a hundred echoes by the pond and the terraced masses of the forest, suddenly drowned their dispute.

"Have you had enough of it? Do you want me to do it again?" And the bulky Hettéma, with purple cheeks and swollen neck, unable to find any other way of making them hold their peace, waited, with the mouthpiece to his lips and the orifice threatening to belch forth afresh.

IX

Their quarrels usually lasted but a short time, vanishing under the influence of a little music and Fanny's effusive cajolery; but this time he was more seriously angry with her, and for several days in succession kept the same wrinkle on his brow and maintained the same indignant silence, sitting down to draw immediately after meals and refusing to go anywhere with her.

It was as if he were suddenly ashamed of the abject life he was leading, afraid of meeting again the little cart ascending the path and that guileless youthful smile of which he thought constantly. Then, with the confusion of a vanishing dream, of scenery broken to facilitate the transformations of a fairy spectacle, the apparition became indistinct, faded away in the windings of the forest path, and Jean saw it no more. But there remained in him a substratum of melancholy of which Fanny thought that she knew the cause, and she determined to banish it.

"I have done it," she said to him joyfully one day. "I have seen Déchelette. I have returned the money to him. He agrees with you that it is better so; upon my word, I wonder why. However, it's done. Later, when I am alone, he will remember the little one. Are you satisfied? Are you still angry with me?"

And she described her visit to Rue de Rome, her

amazement at finding there, instead of the wild, noisy caravansary filled with excited crowds, a tranquil, bourgeois household, governed by very strict rules. No more revels, no more fancy-dress balls; and the explanation of the change, written in chalk over the small door of the studio by some parasite, enraged at being refused admittance: "Closed by reason of marriage."

"And that's the truth, my dear. Déchelette, soon after arriving in Paris, lost his head over a skating-rink girl, Alice Doré; he has had her with him a month, keeping house, actually house! A very nice, sweet little creature, a pretty lamb. They make very little noise both together. I promised that we would go and see them; that will be a little change for us from hunting-horns and barcarolles. What do you say now to the philosopher and his theories? No to-morrow, no *collage*.[1] Ah! I chaffed him well!"

Jean allowed himself to be taken to Déchelette's, whom he had not seen since their meeting at the Madéleine. He would have been vastly surprised then if any one had told him that there would come a time when he would fraternize without a feeling of disgust with that cynical and disdainful former lover of his mistress, and become almost his friend. Even at that first visit, he was surprised to feel so much at home, charmed by the gentle nature and the ingenuous, kindly laughter of that man with the beard of a Cossack and with a serenity of disposition undisturbed by the painful antics of his liver, which gave a

[1] A slang expression meaning—*living as husband and wife though unmarried.*

leaden tinge to his complexion and the circles around his eyes.

And how readily one could understand the affection he inspired in that Alice Doré, with her long, soft, white hands and her insignificant blond beauty, heightened by the splendor of her Flemish flesh, as golden (*dorée*) as her name, by the glint of gold in her hair and in her eyelashes, fringing the eyelids and making the skin sparkle even to the nails.

Picked up by Déchelette on the asphalt of the skating-rink, among the vulgarities and brutalities of the crowd, and the clouds of smoke which a man, as he cuts a flourish, blows into the painted face of a strumpet, she had been surprised and touched by his courtesy. She found herself a woman once more instead of the poor beast of pleasure she had been: and when he would have sent her away in the morning, conformably to his theories, with a hearty breakfast and a few louis, her heart was so heavy, she said to him so gently and so earnestly, "Keep me a little longer!" that he had not the courage to refuse. Afterwards, partly from self-respect, partly from weariness, he kept his door locked on that fortuitous honeymoon, which he passed in the cool tranquillity of his summer palace, so admirably supplied with the comforts of life; and they lived thus very happily, she because of such tender consideration as she had never known, he because of the happiness which he was bestowing upon that poor creature and her gratitude, being subjected thus for the first time, and without realizing it, to the pene-

trating charm of real intimacy with a woman, the mysterious enchantment of life *à deux,* in community of kindness of heart and gentleness of nature.

To Gaussin the studio on Rue de Rome was a diversion from the base and degrading environment of his life as a petty clerk with an illegitimate household; he enjoyed the conversation of that scholar with artistic tastes, of that philosopher in a Persian dressing-gown as airy and loose as his doctrines, and the tales of travel which Déchelette told in the fewest possible words, and which were so appropriate among the Oriental hangings, the gilded Buddhas, the bronze chimeras, the exotic luxuriousness of that vast hall where the light fell from a high window, the same light that we find in the heart of a park, stirred by the slender foliage of the bamboos, by the denticulated fronds of the tree-ferns, and the enormous leaves of the *stillingias,* mingled with philodendrons as thin and flexible as water-plants seeking shade and moisture.

On Sunday especially, with the great bay-window looking on a deserted street of Paris in summer, there was almost as much country and forest there as at Chaville, minus the promiscuousness of the company and the Hettémas' hunting-horn. There was never any company; but on one occasion Gaussin and his mistress, arriving for dinner, heard several voices in animated conversation as soon as they entered the house. Night was falling, they were drinking *raki* in the conservatory, and the discussion seemed to be quite warm.

"For my part, I consider that five years in Mazas, the

loss of one's name, and the ruin of one's life, are a high price to pay for an act of passion and madness. I'll sign your petition, Déchelette."

"That's Caoudal," whispered Fanny, with a start.

Some one rejoined, with a pitilessly curt refusal: "For my part, I'll sign nothing. I'll not connect myself in any way with that rascal."

"And that's La Gournerie!" said Fanny; pressing close to her lover, she murmured: "Let us go, if it annoys you to see them."

"Why so? not at all." In reality he was not quite certain how he should feel when he found himself face to face with those men, but he did not propose to shirk the test, being desirous perhaps to ascertain the present extent of that jealousy which had formed so large a part of his wretched love-affair.

"Let us go in!" he said; and they made their appearance in the reddish light of the close of day, which shone upon the bald heads and grizzly beards of Déchelette's friends as they reclined on the low divans around an Oriental table with three legs, on which the spiced and milky beverage which Alice was serving trembled in five or six glasses. The women kissed. "You know these gentlemen, Gaussin," said Déchelette, rocking gently in his chair.

Did he know them? Two of them at least were familiar to him, by virtue of his having stared at their pictures for hours in the show-cases of celebrities. How they had made him suffer, what bitter hatred he had conceived for them, the hatred of a successor, a fierce longing to leap upon

them when he met them in the street, and claw their faces! But Fanny had well said that that would pass away; now they were simply the faces of acquaintances, almost of kinsmen, distant uncles whom he saw again after many years.

"The youngster's still handsome!" said Caoudal, his gigantic form stretched out at full length, holding a screen over his eyes to protect them from the glare. "And, Fanny, let us look at you!" He lifted himself on his elbow and winked his expert eyes: "The face still holds its own; but the waist,—you do well to lace good and tight; however, console yourself, my girl, La Gournerie is stouter than you are."

The poet pursed up his thin lips disdainfully. Sitting Turkish fashion on his pile of cushions,—since his trip to Algiers he claimed that he could sit no other way,—an enormous, pulpy mass, with no trace of intelligence remaining save his noble forehead beneath a white forest, and his stern negro-like glance, he affected a well-bred reserve with Fanny, an exaggerated courtesy, as if to give Caoudal a lesson.

Two landscape painters with sun-burned, rustic faces completed the party; they too knew Jean's mistress, and the younger of them said to her, pressing her hand,—

"Déchelette has told us the story of the child, and what you have done is very fine, my dear."

"Yes," said Caoudal to Gaussin; "yes, exceedingly *chic*. Not in the least provincial."

She seemed embarrassed by their laudatory words; but

at that moment some one stumbled against a piece of furniture in the dark studio, and a voice inquired, "No one here?"

"Here's Ezano," said Déchelette.

Jean had never seen him; but he knew how great a place that Bohemian, that imaginative creature, now reformed and married, and chief of a division at the Beaux-Arts, had played in Fanny Legrand's life, and he remembered a package of passionate and charming letters. A small man came forward, hollow-cheeked, wrinkled, walking stiffly, who gave his hand at a distance, kept people at arm's length as a result of the habit of speaking from a platform, of administrative exclusiveness. He seemed much surprised to see Fanny, especially to find her still lovely after so many years.

"Why, Sapho!" and a furtive flush enlivened his cheekbones.

That name Sapho, which carried her back to the past, and brought her nearer to all her former lovers, caused a certain embarrassment.

"And this is Monsieur d'Armandy, who brought her," said Déchelette, hastily, to warn the new-comer. Ezano bowed; they began to talk.

Fanny, reassured when she saw how her lover took the state of affairs, and being proud of him, of his beauty and his youth, in that party of artists and connoisseurs, was very animated, in high feather. Engrossed by her present passion, she hardly remembered her liaisons with those men; but years of cohabitation, of life in common, left

behind them the stamp of habits, of peculiarities communicated by contact and surviving it, even to the way of rolling cigarettes, which, like her preference for Maryland tobacco, was a legacy from Ezano.

Without the slightest annoyance Jean remarked that little detail, which would once have exasperated him, experiencing, when he found how calm he was, the joy of a prisoner who has filed his chains and feels that a slight effort will suffice for his escape.

"Hein! my dear Fanny," said Caoudal, in a chaffing tone, pointing to the others, "what a falling off! see how old they are, how they've flattened out! we two are the only ones who hold our own."

Fanny began to laugh: "Ah! I beg your pardon, colonel,"—he was called so sometimes because of his moustaches,—"it isn't altogether the same thing. I'm of another promotion."

"Caoudal always forgets that he's an old fogy," said Le Gournerie; and at a gesture from the sculptor, whom he knew that he had touched to the quick, he cried in his strident voice: "Medal of 1840; there's a date to reckon from, my boy!"

Those two old friends always adopted an aggressive tone toward each other; there was an under-current of antipathy between them, which had never separated them, but which came to the surface in their glances, in their lightest words; and it dated from the day when the poet stole the sculptor's mistress. Fanny was no longer of any consequence to them; they had both known other joys,

other mortifications, but the bitterness remained, sinking deeper and deeper with the years.

"Just look at us two, and say honestly whether I am the old fogy!" Caoudal stood erect, in the tightly fitting jacket, which showed his bulging muscles, with his chest thrown out, shaking his fiery mane in which not a white hair could be seen.

"Medal of 1840,—fifty-eight years old in three months. Even so, what does that prove? Is it age that makes old men? It's only at the Comédie-Francaise and the Conservatoire that men drool at sixty and keep their heads nodding and totter along with bent back and limp legs and senile tricks of all sorts. *Sacrebleu!* at sixty a man's more erect than at thirty, because he takes care of himself; and the women will love you still as long as your heart remains young and warms and stirs up your whole carcass."

"Do you think so?" said La Gournerie, glancing at Fanny with a sneer. And Déchelette rejoined with his kindly smile,——

"And yet you always said that there's nothing like youth; you're a tiresome fellow."

"It was my little Cousinard who made me change my views,—Cousinard, my new model. Eighteen years old, rounded outlines, dimples everywhere, a Clodeon. And such a bright one, such a typical child of the people, of the Paris of the Market, where her mother sells poultry! She makes absurd remarks that make you want to kiss her; on my word, they do. The other day in the studio she takes up one of Dejoie's novels, looks at the title, *Thérèse,*

and throws it down again with her pretty little pout: 'If he'd called it *Poor* Thérèse, I'd have read it all right!' I am mad over her, I tell you."

"Before you know it you'll be keeping house. And six months hence another rupture, tears as big as your fist, distaste for work, and fits of temper when you want to kill everybody."

Caoudal's brow grew dark.

"It is true that nothing lasts. We take up with one another, then part——"

"In that case why take up with one another?"

"Indeed, and what about yourself? Do you think that you are settled for life with your Fleming?"

"Oh! as for us, we are not housekeeping, are we, Alice?"

"Of course not," replied the girl, in a sweet, distraught voice; she was standing on a chair picking glycine and leaves to decorate the table. Déchelette continued,—

"There'll be no rupture between us, hardly a parting. We have taken a lease of two months to be passed together; on the last day we shall separate without surprise on either side and without despair. I shall return to Ispahan,—I have already taken my berth in the sleeper, —and Alice to her little apartment on Rue La Bruyère, which she has not given up."

"On the third floor above the entresol, the most convenient place in the world for throwing oneself out of window!"

As she spoke the young woman smiled, red-cheeked and luminous in the fading light, her heavy bunch of

purple flowers in her hand; but the tone of her voice was so deep, so solemn, that no one replied. The wind freshened; the houses opposite seemed taller.

"Let us adjourn to the table," cried the colonel, "and let us say idiotic things."

"Yes, that's the idea, *gaudeamus igitur,*—let us amuse ourselves while we're young, eh, Caoudal?" said La Gournerie, with a laugh that rang false.

A few days later Jean went again to Rue de Rome; he found the studio closed, the great canvas shade lowered over the window, death-like silence from the cellar to the terraced roof. Déchelette had gone at the appointed time, the lease having expired. And he thought: "It is a fine thing to do what one chooses in life, to govern one's mind and one's heart. Shall I ever have the courage to do what he has done?"

A hand was placed on his shoulder.

"How are you, Gaussin?"

Déchelette, looking worn and weary, sallower and sterner than usual, explained to him that he had not yet left Paris, being detained by some business matters, and that he was living at the Grand Hotel, having a horror of the studio since that frightful thing happened there.

"What do you mean?"

"To be sure, you don't know. Alice is dead. She killed herself. Wait a moment, till I see if there are any letters for me."

He returned almost immediately; and as he tore the

wrappers from the newspapers with nervous fingers, he talked in a low voice, like a somnambulist, without looking at Gaussin, who was walking beside him,—

"Yes, killed herself, threw herself out of the window, as she said the evening you were there. What would you have? for my part, I did not know, I could not suspect. The day I was to go, she said to me calmly: 'Take me, Déchelette; don't leave me alone; I can't live without you now.' That made me laugh. Imagine me with a woman among those Kurds! The desert, the fever, the nights in camp. At dinner she said again: 'I won't be in your way; you will see how good I'll be.' Then, seeing that she annoyed me, she did not insist any farther. Later, we went to the Variétés, where we had a box; it was all planned beforehand. She seemed satisfied, held my hand all the time, and whispered, 'I am happy.' As I was to start during the night, I carried her home in a cab; we were both of us very melancholy, did not say a word. She didn't even thank me for a little package which I slipped into her pocket, to enable her to live in comfort for a year or two. When we reached Rue La Bruyère, she asked me to go up. I refused. 'I entreat you, just as far as the door.' But when I got there, I held to my word; I would not go in. My berth was taken, my trunk packed, and, besides, I had talked too much about going. As I went downstairs, a little heavy-hearted, I heard her call after me something that sounded like, 'Sooner than you,' but I didn't understand till I got down to the street. Oh!"

He paused, his eyes fixed on the ground, before the

horrible vision which the sidewalk presented now at every step, that black, inert mass in the agony of death.

"She died two hours later, without a word, without a complaint, her golden eyes looking into mine. Did she suffer? Did she recognize me? We laid her on her bed, fully dressed, a long lace mantle wrapped around her head on one side to conceal the wound in her skull. Very pale, with a little blood on her temple, she was pretty still, and so sweet and gentle! But as I stooped to wipe away that drop of blood, which was instantly replaced by another, from an inexhaustible source, her face seemed to me to assume an indignant, terrible expression. It was as if the poor girl hurled a silent malediction at me. Indeed, what harm would it have done to remain here a little longer, or to take her with me, ready for anything as she was, and so little trouble? No pride, but obstinacy in keeping to what I had said—Well, I did not yield, and she is dead, dead by my fault; and yet I loved her."

He grew more and more excited, talked very loud, to the amazement of the people whom he jostled as they walked down Rue d'Amsterdam; and Gaussin, as he passed his former lodging, whose balcony and zinc tent he could see from the street, thought of Fanny and their own story and felt a shudder run through his veins as Déchelette continued:—

"I took her to Montparnasse, without friends or relatives. I wanted to be alone to think about her. And since then I have stayed on here, always thinking of the same thing, unable to make up my mind to go away, with that

idea in full possession of me, and avoiding my house, where I passed two months so happily with her. I live out of doors; I go from place to place; I try to distract my thoughts, to escape that dead woman's eye, which accuses me under a thread of blood."

Possessed by his remorse, he stopped, while two great tears glided down his little flat nose, so kindly, so in love with life, and said,—

"So it is, my friend; and yet I am not cruel. But what I did was a little hard, all the same."

Jean tried to comfort him, attributing everything to chance, to an unkind fate; but Déchelette, shaking his head, repeated through his clenched teeth,—

"No, no; I shall never forgive myself. I would like to punish myself."

That longing for expiation did not cease to haunt him; he talked about it to all his friends, to Gaussin, whom he went to the office to meet in the afternoon.

"Why don't you go away, Déchelette? Travel, work; it will divert your mind," Caoudal and the others said to him again and again, being a little disturbed by his fixed idea, by his persistence in repeating that he was not naturally cruel. At last, one evening,—whether it was that he had felt a desire to see the studio once more before going away, or that he had gone thither in pursuance of a fixed determination to put an end to his misery,—he returned to his own house; and in the morning, workmen, going down from the faubourg to their work, found him, with his skull fractured, on the sidewalk in front of his door,

dead by the same form of suicide as the woman, with the same shocking circumstances, the same horrible commotion caused by despair cast naked into the street.

In the half-light of the studio, a crowd of artists, models, actresses, all the dancers, all the guests of the latest festivities, pushed and jostled one another. There was a noise of tramping feet and whispering, the sounds of a mortuary chapel under the short flame of the tapers. Through the convolvuli and the foliage they gazed at the body, dressed in a gown of flowered silk with gold flowers, a turban on the head to hide the ghastly wound, lying at full length, the white hands by the sides in an attitude that told of the final collapse and surrender, on the low couch, shaded by glycines, where Gaussin and his mistress had become acquainted on the night of the ball.

X

So these ruptures sometimes ended in death! Now, when they quarreled, Jean no longer dared to mention his departure, he no longer exclaimed in his exasperation: "Luckily this won't last long." She would simply have had to retort: "Very well, go; I will kill myself; I will do as she did." And that threat, which he fancied that he could read in her melancholy expression, in the melancholy songs she sang, and in her reveries when she was silent, disturbed him even to terror.

Meanwhile he had passed the examination which closes the stage of service in the department offices for consular attachés; as he had acquitted himself creditably, he would be appointed to one of the first vacant posts,—it was only a matter of weeks, of days! And all about them, in those last days of the season, as the hours of sunlight grew shorter and shorter, everything was hastening on toward the changes that winter brings. One morning Fanny cried, as she opened the window to the first fog,—

"Look, the swallows have gone!"

One after another the bourgeois country houses put up their shutters; on the Versailles road there was a constant succession of furniture vans, of great country omnibuses laden with bundles, with plumes of green plants on the roof, while the leaves blew away in eddying multi-

tudes, swept along like flying clouds under the low sky, and the windmills stood alone in the bare fields. Behind the orchard, stripped of its fruits and made smaller in appearance by the absence of foliage, the closed chalets, the red-roofed drying-houses of the laundries, huddled together in the melancholy landscape; and on the other side of the house, the railway, no longer masked, extended along the colorless forest in an endless black line.

How cruel to leave her all alone amid those melancholy surroundings! He felt his heart fail him in anticipation; he should never have the courage to bid her adieu. That was precisely what she relied upon, awaiting that supreme moment, and until then maintaining a tranquil demeanor, never mentioning the subject, true to her promise to place no obstacles in the way of his departure, which had been foreseen and agreed to in the beginning. One day he returned home with this news,—

"I have been appointed."

"Ah; to what place?"

She asked the question with feigned indifference, but the color faded from her lips and the light from her eyes, and her features were so contracted by pain, that he did not prolong the torture: "No, no; not yet. I have let Hédouin have my turn; that gives us at least six months."

Then there was a flood of tears and laughter and frantic kisses, and she stammered: "Thanks, thanks! How happy I will make your life now! That was what made me spiteful, you see,—the thought of your going away." She proposed now to prepare herself better, to resign herself

gradually. And then, six months hence, it would no longer be autumn, with the horror of those two deaths in addition.

She kept her word. No more nervous outbreaks, no more quarrels; and, furthermore, to avoid the annoyance of the child's presence, she made up her mind to put him at a boarding-school at Versailles. He came home only on Sunday; and if the new order of things did not at once abate his wild and rebellious nature, it taught him hypocrisy, at all events. They lived in a tranquil atmosphere, the dinners with the Hettémas passed off without a tempest, and the piano was opened once more for the favorite melodies. But at heart Jean was more disturbed, more perplexed than ever, asking himself where his weakness would lead him, and thinking seriously at times of abandoning the consular service for permanent departmental work. That meant Paris, and an indefinite renewal of the lease of his present life; but it meant also the demolition of all his youthful dreams, the despair of his family, and an inevitable rupture with his father, who would never forgive that backsliding, especially when he knew the reasons.

And for whom? For a faded, prematurely old creature, whom he no longer loved—he had proved that to his satisfaction in presence of her lovers. That being so, what witchcraft was there in that life?

One morning in the last days of October, as he entered the train, a young girl's glance met his and suddenly reminded him of his encounter in the woods, of the radiant

charm of that child-woman whose image had haunted him for months. She wore the same light dress which the sun flecked so prettily under the trees, but over it was thrown an ample traveling cloak; and a package of books, a little bag, and a bunch of long reeds and the latest flowers, that lay beside her on the seat, told the story of the return to Paris, of the end of the season in the country. She had recognized him, too, with a half smile quivering in her eyes, as clear and pure as spring water; and for an instant there was the unexpressed concord of identity of thought between those two.

"How's your mother, Monsieur d'Armandy?" suddenly inquired old Bouchereau, whom the bewildered Jean had not noticed at first, buried in his corner, his pale face bending over his newspaper.

Jean answered his question, deeply touched that he should remember him and his; and his emotion was greatly increased when the girl asked about the two little twins, who had written her uncle such a pretty letter to thank him for what he had done for their mother. She knew of them! that thought filled him with joy; then, as he was, it would appear, in an unusually susceptible mood that morning, he instantly became depressed when he learned that they were returning to Paris, and that Bouchereau was about to begin his lectures at the École de Médecin. He would have no further opportunities to see her. And the fields flying by the windows, beautiful but a moment before, seemed dark and dismal as if the sun were in eclipse.

The locomotive blew a long whistle; they had arrived. He bowed and lost sight of them; but at the exit from the station they met again, and Bouchereau amid the uproar of the crowd informed him that after the following Thursday he should be at home on Place Vendôme—if his heart prompted him to drink a cup of tea. She took her uncle's arm, and it seemed to Jean that it was she who invited him, without speaking.

After having decided several times that he would call upon Bouchereau, then that he would not—for what was the use of subjecting himself to unnecessary regrets?—he announced at home that there was soon to be a large evening party at the department, which it would be necessary for him to attend. Fanny examined his coat, ironed his white cravat; and when Thursday evening came he suddenly discovered that he had not the slightest wish to go out. But his mistress argued with him as to the necessity of the task, reproaching herself for having monopolized him too much, for having selfishly kept him to herself, and she persuaded him, finished dressing him with affectionate playfulness, retouched the bow of his cravat and his hair, laughed because her fingers smelt of the cigarette, which she laid on the mantel and took up again every minute, and it would make his partners turn up their noses. And when he saw her so bright and good-humored, he was filled with remorse for his lie, and would gladly have remained with her by the fire if she had not insisted, "I want you to go—you must!" and lovingly pushed him out into the dark road.

It was late when he returned; she was asleep, and the lamplight shining on that sleep of fatigue reminded him of a similar home-coming, already three years ago, after the terrible revelations that had been made to him. What a coward he had shown himself then! By what strange caprice of fate had the very thing which should have broken his chain riveted it more tightly? He was fairly nauseated with disgust and loathing. The room, the bed, the woman, all were equally horrible to him; he took the light and softly carried it into the adjoining room. He longed so to be alone that he might reflect upon what had happened to him—oh! nothing, almost nothing—

He was in love!

There is in certain words in common use a secret spring which suddenly lays open their inmost depths, and explains them to us in their exceptional private signification; then the word shuts itself up again, resumes its commonplace form and goes its way, unmeaning, worn threadbare by automatic, every-day use. Love is one of these words; those to whom its whole significance has been once made clear will understand the delicious agony in which Jean had been living for an hour, with no very definite idea at first as to what his feelings meant.

On Place Vendôme, in the corner of the salon where they had talked together for a long while, he was conscious of nothing save a sense of perfect comfort, a sweet charm which encompassed him.

Not until he was outside the house once more and the

door closed behind him, was he seized by a wild outburst of joy, then by a great wave of faintness as if all his veins were opened:—

"Great God! what is the matter with me?" And the Paris through whose streets he walked toward his home seemed to him entirely novel, fairylike, magnified, radiant.

Yes, at that hour when the beasts of night are set free and are lurking about, when the filth from the sewers comes to the surface, makes itself manifest and swarms under the yellow gas, the Paris that he saw, he, Sapho's lover, interested in all forms of debauchery, was the Paris that the innocent maiden may see as she returns from the ball with her head filled with dance music, which she hums to the stars beneath her white dress,— that chaste Paris bathed in moonlight wherein virgin souls open to the light! And suddenly, as he ascended the broad staircase at the station, almost on the threshold of his wretched home, he surprised himself saying aloud: "Why, I love her! I love her!" and that was the way he had learned it.

"Are you there, Jean? What on earth are you doing?"

Fanny awoke with a start, frightened because she did not feel him by her side. He must needs go and kiss her, lie to her, describe the ball at the department, tell her whether there were any pretty dresses there and with whom he had danced; but to escape that inquisition and,

above all, the caresses which he dreaded, impregnated as he was with the memory of the other, he invented some urgent work, drawings for Hettéma.

"The fire's out; you will be cold."

"No, no."

"At least, leave the door open, so that I can see your lamp."

He must act his lie out to the end, put the table in position and the plans; then he sat down, holding his breath, and thought, recalled all the incidents of the evening, and, to fix his dream in his mind, described it to Césaire in a long letter, while the night wind stirred the branches, which creaked and groaned without the rustling of leaves, while the trains rumbled by one after another, and while La Balue, annoyed by the light, moved about in his little cage and jumped from one perch to the other with hesitating cries.

He told him everything, the meeting in the woods, in the railway carriage, his strange emotion on entering those salons which had seemed to them so dismal and tragic on the day of the consultation, with all the furtive whispering in the doorways and the sorrowful glances exchanged from chair to chair, and which, on that evening, were thrown open to him, full of life and animation, in a long brilliantly lighted line. Even Bouchereau himself had not that stern countenance, that black eye, searching and disconcerting under its great, bushy eyebrow, but the placid, paternal expression of a worthy

bourgeois who is pleased to have people enjoy themselves in his house.

"Suddenly she came toward me, and I saw nothing more. Her name is Irène, my dear uncle; she is very pretty, with an attractive manner, hair of the golden brown common among English girls, a child's mouth always ready to laugh—but not that laughter without merriment that excites one in so many women; a genuine overflow of youth and happiness. She was born in London; but her father was French, and she has no foreign accent at all, only an adorable way of pronouncing certain words, of saying 'uncle,' which brings a caress to old Bouchereau's eyes every time. He took her into his family to relieve his brother, who has numerous children, and to replace Irène's sister, the oldest child, who married the chief of his clinical staff two years ago. But doctors don't suit her at all. How she amused me with the idiocy of that young *savant* who demanded that his fiancée, first of all, should enter into a solemn and formal agreement to bequeath both their bodies to the Anthropological Society! She is a migratory bird. She is fond of boats and the sea; the sight of a bowsprit pointed seaward touches her heart. She told me all this freely, as to a comrade, a true *miss* in her manners despite her Parisian grace; and I listened to her, enchanted by her voice, her laughter, the similarity of our tastes, a secret certainty that the happiness of my life was there at my hand, and that I had only to grasp it, to carry it far away, wherever the chances of 'the career' might send me."

"Do come to bed, my dear."

He started, stopped writing, instinctively hid the unfinished letter: "In a few minutes. Go to sleep; go to sleep."

He spoke angrily, and, bending over the table, listened for the return of sleep in her breathing; for they were very near together, and so far apart!

"Whatever happens, this meeting and this love will be my salvation. You know what my life is; you will have understood, without my ever mentioning it, that it is the same as before, that I have not been able to free myself. But what you do not know is that I was ready to sacrifice fortune, future, everything, to this fatal habit, in which I was sinking a little deeper every day. Now I have found the mainspring, the prop that I lacked; and in order to give my weakness no further opportunity, I have sworn never to go to that house again until we have separated and I am free. To-morrow I make my escape."

But he did not do it the next day or the day after. He needed some excuse for flight, some pretext, the climax of a quarrel in which one exclaims, "I am going away!" to cover his failure to return; and Fanny was as sweet and cheerful as in the early illusion-ridden days of their housekeeping.

Should he write, "It is all over between us," without any further explanations? But that violent creature would never be resigned to that, she would ferret him out, would pursue him to the door of his house, of his office.

No, it would be much better to attack her face to face, to convince her of the irrevocableness, of the finality of the rupture, and to enumerate the reasons for it without anger, but without pity.

But with these reflections the dread of a suicide like Alice Doré's recurred to his mind. In front of their house, on the other side of the street, was a lane running down to the railroad track and closed by a gate; the neighbors went that way when they were in a hurry, and walked along the track to the station. And in his mind's eye, the Southerner saw his mistress, after the final scene, rush across the road, down the lane, and throw herself under the wheels of the train which whirled him away. That dread beset him so, that the bare thought of that gate between two ivy-covered walls made him postpone the explanation.

If he had only had a friend, some one to take care of her, to assist her in the first paroxysm; but living underground as they were, like mountain rats in their *collage,* they knew no one; and the Hettémas, those abnormal egoists, shiny and swimming in fat, whose animalism became more marked with the approach of the season for hibernating, like the Esquimaux, were not people upon whom the poor creature could call for help in her despair and her abandonment.

He must break with her, however, and do it quickly. Despite his promise to himself, Jean had been to Place Vendôme two or three times, and had fallen deeper and deeper in love; and although the subject had not as yet

been mentioned, the hearty welcome accorded him by old Bouchereau, and Irène's attitude, wherein reserve was blended with affectionate indulgence, and what seemed to be excited anticipation of a declaration,—everything urged him to delay no longer. And then, too, the torture of lying, the pretexts he invented to satisfy Fanny, and the species of sacrilege in going from Sapho's kisses to lay his respectful, faltering homage at the other's feet.

XI

While he was hesitating between these alternatives, he found a card on his table at the department, the card of a gentleman who had already called twice during the morning, said the usher, with a certain respect for the following nomenclature:—

C. GAUSSIN D'ARMANDY,
President of the Submersionists of the Rhone Valley,
Member of the Central Committee of Study and
Vigilance, Departmental Delegate, etc., etc.

Uncle Césaire in Paris! Le Fénat, a delegate, member of a vigilance committee! He had not recovered from his stupor when his uncle appeared, still as brown as a pine-apple, with the same wondering eyes, the laugh wrinkling his temples, and the beard of the days of the League; but, instead of the everlasting fustian jacket, a new broadcloth frock-coat buttoned tightly over his stomach and endowing the little man with truly presidential majesty.

What brought him to Paris? The purchase of an elevating machine for the immersion of his new vines,—he uttered the word *élévatoire* with an air of conviction which magnified him in his own eyes,—and to arrange for a bust of himself which his colleagues desired as an ornament to the directors' room.

"As you have seen by my card," he said modestly, "they have chosen me president. My idea of submersion is making a great sensation in the South. And to think that I, Le Fénat, am actually the man to save the vineyards of France! Only the crazy fellows are good for anything, you see."

But the principal object of his journey was the rupture with Fanny. Realizing that the affair was dragging, he had come to lend a hand. "I know all about such creatures, as you can imagine. When Courbebaisse let his go, in order to get married——" Before attacking his story, he stopped, unbuttoned his coat and produced a little wallet with well-rounded sides.

"In the first place, relieve me of this. Take it, I say! money—to grease the wheels." He misunderstood his nephew's gesture and thought that he refused from motives of delicacy. "Take it! take it! It makes me proud to be able to repay the son for a little of what the father has done for me. Besides, Divonne wants me to do it. She knows all about the affair, and is so glad to know that you're thinking of marrying and shaking off your old crampfish!"

Jean thought that "old crampfish" was a little unjust in Césaire's mouth after the service his mistress had done him, and he replied with a touch of bitterness,—

"Take back your wallet, uncle; you know better than any one how indifferent Fanny is to such considerations."

"Yes, she was a good girl," said the uncle, by way of funeral oration; and he added, winking his crow's foot,—

"Keep the money all the same. There are so many temptations in Paris that I prefer to have it in your hands instead of mine; and then, too, you need it for ruptures just as you do for duels."

With that he rose from his chair, declaring that he was dying of hunger and that that momentous question could be discussed more satisfactorily at the breakfast table, fork in hand. It was the typical airy, jesting tone of the Southerner in discussing questions relating to women.

"Between ourselves, my boy,"—they were seated in a restaurant on Rue de Bourgogne, and the uncle, his napkin tucked in his neck, was beaming with satisfaction, while Jean nibbled with the ends of his teeth, unable to eat,—"it seems to me that you take the thing too tragically. I know very well that the first step is hard, the explanation an infernal bore; but if you feel that it's too much for you, say nothing at all,—do as Courbebaisse did. Up to the very morning of the wedding, La Mornas knew nothing about it. At night, on leaving his intended, he would go to the place where the singer was squalling and escort her home. You will say that that wasn't very regular, nor very honest either. But when one isn't fond of scenes, and with such terrible creatures as Paola Mornas! For nearly ten years that tall, handsome fellow had trembled before that little hussy. When it came to cutting loose, he had to manœuvre, to resort to stratagem." And this is how he went about it.

On the day before the wedding, one Fifteenth of Au-

gust, the day of the great festival, Césaire proposed to the young woman that they should go and fish in the Yvette. Courbebaisse was to join them for dinner; and then they would all three return together on the following evening, when Paris would have evaporated its odor of dust, of exploded fire-crackers and oil-lamps. She assented. Behold them both lying at full length on the bank of that little stream, which purls and gleams between its low shores, and makes the fields so green and the willows so leafy. After the fishing, the bath. It was not the first time that he and Paola had swum together, like two boys, like comrades; but on that day that little Mornas, with her bare arms and legs, her perfectly moulded gypsy-like body, to which the wet costume clung closely everywhere —perhaps, too, the thought that Courbebaisse had given him *carte blanche*. Ah! the little wretch! She turned, looked him in the eyes, and said sternly,—

"You understand, Césaire; don't try that again."

He did not insist, for fear of spoiling his chances, but said to himself, "I will wait till after dinner."

Very merry the dinner was, on the wooden balcony of the inn between the two flags which the landlord had hoisted in honor of the Fifteenth of August. It was very warm, the sweet hay was very fragrant, and they could hear the drums and fireworks and the music of the hurdy-gurdy trundling through the streets.

"How stupid it is of that Courbebaisse not to come till tomorrow," said La Mornas, stretching out her arms, with

a gleam of champagne in her eyes. "I feel like having some fun to-night."

"Gad! and so do I!"

He was leaning by her side on the balcony rail, which was still burning hot from the scorching rays of the sun, and slyly, as an experiment, slipped his arm around her waist, "Oh, Paola! Paola!" That time, instead of being angry, the singer began to laugh, but so loud and heartily that he ended by doing the same. A similar attempt was repulsed in the same way in the evening, when they returned from the fête, where they had danced and eaten sweets; and as their bedrooms adjoined, she sang to him through the partition: "You are too small, oh! you are too small,"—with all sorts of uncomplimentary comparisons between Courbebaisse and himself. He was strongly tempted to retort, to call her the widow Mornas; but it was too soon. The next day, however, as they sat before a bountiful breakfast, and when Paola had become impatient and finally anxious at her man's failure to appear, it was with considerable satisfaction that he drew his watch and said solemnly:

"Noon! it is all over."

"What do you mean?"

"He is married."

"Who?"

"Courbebaisse."

Vlan!

"Ah! my boy, what a blow! In all my love-making I

never received such a one. And on the instant she insisted on starting off. But there was no train till four o'clock. And meanwhile the unfaithful one was scorching the rails of the P. L. and M. on his way to Italy with his wife. Thereupon she turned on me again and took it out of me with her fists and her claws,—such luck!—when I had turned the key in the door; then she went for the furniture, and finally fell on the floor in a terrible attack of hysteria. At five they put her on her bed and held her there; while I, all torn and bleeding as if I had just been through a thicket of brambles, hurried off to find Doctor d'Orsay. In such affairs it's just the same as it is in dueling, you should always have a doctor in attendance. Fancy me rushing along the road with an empty stomach, and in such a hot sun! It was dark when I returned with him. Suddenly, as I approached the inn, I heard the sound of voices and saw a crowd under the windows. Great God? Great God? had she killed herself? had she killed some one else? With La Mornas the latter was more probable. I rushed forward, and what did I see? The balcony strung with Venetian lanterns, and the singer standing there, consoled and superb, wrapped in one of the flags and shrieking the *Marseillaise* as a contribution to the imperial holiday, above the applauding multitude.

"And that, my boy, is how Courbebaisse's liaison came to an end; I won't say that it was all ended at one stroke. After ten years of imprisonment, one must always expect a brief period of surveillance. But the worst of it fell on

me, at all events; and I will stand as much from yours, if you choose."

"Ah! uncle, she's not the same kind of a woman."

"Nonsense," said Césaire, breaking the seal of a box of cigars and holding them to his ear to make sure they were dry; "you're not the first man who has left her."

"That is true enough."

And Jean joyfully grasped at that suggestion, which would have torn his heart a few months before. His uncle and his amusing story really encouraged him a little, but what he could not endure was the living a twofold lie for months, the hypocrisy, the division of his time; he could never make up his mind to that, and had waited only too long.

"What do you mean to do, then?"

While the young man was struggling with his perplexities, the member of the vigilance committee combed his beard, experimented with smiles, attitudes, different ways of carrying the head, then inquired with a careless air,—

"Does he live very far from here?"

"Who, pray?"

"Why, this artist, this Caoudal, whom you suggested to me for my bust. We might go and inquire his prices while we are together."

Caoudal, although he had become famous, was a great spendthrift and still lived on Rue d'Assas, the scene of his early successes. Césaire, as they walked thither, in-

quired concerning his rank as an artist; he would ask a big price, of course, but the gentlemen of the committee insisted upon a work of the first order.

"Oh! you need have no fear, uncle, if Caoudal is willing to undertake it." And he enumerated the sculptor's titles,—Member of the Institute, Commander of the Legion of Honor, and a multitude of foreign orders. Le Fénat opened his eyes in amazement.

"And you are friends?"

"Very good friends."

"What a place this Paris is? What fine acquaintances one makes here!"

Gaussin would have been somewhat ashamed to confess that Caoudal was one of Fanny's old lovers, and that she had brought them together. But one would have said that Césaire was thinking of it.

"Is he the one who did that Sapho we have at Castelet? Then he knows your mistress and can help you, perhaps, to break with her. The Institute, the Legion of Honor, —those things always make an impression on a woman."

Jean did not reply; perhaps he too thought that he might make use of the first lover's influence.

The uncle continued with a hearty laugh:—

"By the way, you know the bronze is no longer in your father's room. When Divonne learned, when I was unlucky enough to have to tell her that it represented your mistress, she wouldn't have it there. Considering the consul's whims, his objections to the slightest change, it wasn't an easy matter to move it, especially without let-

ting him suspect the reason. Oh, these women! She managed so cleverly that to-day Monsieur Thiers presides over your father's mantel, and poor Sapho lies in the dust in the windy chamber, with the old firedogs and cast-off furniture; she suffered too in the moving,—her headdress was smashed and her lyre broken off. Doubtless Divonne's spite was the cause of her misfortune."

They reached Rue d'Assas. In view of the modest, hard-working aspect of that city of artists, of studios with numbered barn-like doors, opening on both sides of a long courtyard at the end of which were the ugly buildings of a district school with a perpetual murmur of reading, the president of the Submersionists conceived fresh doubts as to the talent of a man so modestly quartered; but as soon as he entered Caoudal's studio, he knew what to expect.

"Not for a hundred thousand francs, not for a million!" roared the sculptor at Gaussin's first word; and slowly raising his long body from the couch on which he lay in the center of the disorderly, neglected studio, he added: "A bust! Oh, yes! just look at that mass of plaster in a thousand pieces on the floor,—my group for the next Salon, which I have just pulverized with a mallet. That's all I care for sculpture, and tempting as monsieur's lineaments are——"

"Gaussin d'Armandy, president——"

The uncle collected all his titles, but there were too many of them; Caoudal interrupted him and turned to the younger man.—

"You are staring at me, Gaussin. Do you think I have grown old?"

It was quite true that he looked his full age in that light from above falling upon scars, the furrows and wrinkles of his dissipated, fatigued face, his lion's mane showing bald spots like old carpet, his cheeks hanging and flabby, and his moustache of the color of tarnished gilt, which he no longer took the trouble to curl or dye. What was the use? Cousinard, the little model, had gone. "Yes, my dear fellow, with my moulder, a savage, a brute, but twenty years old!"

His tone was fierce and ironical, and he strode up and down the studio, kicking aside a stool that stood in his path. Suddenly, halting in front of the mirror with a carved copper frame over the couch, he looked at himself with a ghastly grimace: "What an ugly, played-out thing! veins and dewlaps like an old cow!" He put his hand to his face, and in a piteous, comical tone, with the foresight of an old beau bewailing his charms: "To think that I shall regret even this, next year!"

The uncle was horrified. The idea of that academician talking in that tone and telling about his vile love-affairs! So there were crackbrains everywhere, even in the Institute; and his admiration for the great man lessened with the sympathy he felt for his weaknesses.

"How's Fanny? Are you still at Chaville?" said Caoudal, suddenly subsiding and sitting down beside Gaussin, and tapping him familiarly on his shoulder.

"Oh, poor Fanny! we haven't much longer to live together."

"Are you going away?"

"Yes, very soon; and I am going to be married first. I have got to leave her."

The sculptor laughed a savage laugh.

"Bravo! I am delighted to hear it. Avenge us, my boy; avenge us on those trollops. Deceive them, throw them over, and let them weep, the wretches! You will never do them as much harm as they have done to others."

Uncle Césaire was triumphant.

"You see, monsieur doesn't take such a tragic view of the affair as you do. Can you imagine such a zany? What keeps him from leaving her is the fear that she will kill herself!"

Jean frankly avowed the effect that Alice Doré's suicide had made upon him.

"But this is a different matter," said Caoudal, earnestly. "That girl was a melancholy, soft creature, with hands always falling at her sides,—poor doll without any sawdust. Déchelette was wrong in thinking that she died for him. A suicide from fatigue and disgust with life. While Sapho—ah! yes, she'll kill herself! She's too fond of love for that; she'll burn to the end, down to the *bobèches*. She's of the race of *jeunes premiers,* who never change their line of parts and die, toothless and without eyelashes, in their *jeune premier* costumes. Just look at me. Do I kill myself? It's of no use for me to grieve. I know per-

fectly well that now she has gone I shall take another, that I must always have one. Your mistress will do as I do, as she has done before. Only she is no longer young, and it will be a harder task."

Still the uncle was triumphant: "You feel better now, eh?"

Jean said nothing, but his scruples were overcome and his mind made up. They were going away, when the sculptor called them back to show them a photograph which he took from the dust on his table and wiped with his sleeve. "See, there she is. Isn't she a pretty one, the hussy, to kneel before? Those legs, that breast!" The contrast was terrible between those glowing eyes, that passionate voice, and the senile trembling of the great, spatula-shaped fingers in which quivered the smiling image of Cousinard, the little model, with her dimpled charms.

XII

"Is it you? How early you have come home!"

She came in from the garden, her skirt full of fallen apples, and ran quickly up the steps, disturbed by her lover's manner, which was at once embarrassed and determined.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing; it's this weather, this bright sunshine. I wanted to make the most of the last fine day to take a turn in the forest, we two. What do you say?"

She gave her street urchin's cry, which came to her lips whenever she was pleased.

"Oh, what luck!" For more than a month they had not been out, housed by the rains and winds of November. It was not always entertaining in the country; one might as well live in the Ark with Noah and his beasts. She had a few orders to give in the kitchen, because of the Hettémas, who were coming to dinner; and while he waited outside on the Pavé des Gardes, Jean gazed at the little house, warmed by that mild Indian summer light, and at the broad moss-covered pavement of the country street, with that farewell, all-embracing and endowed with memory, which we say with our eyes to places we are about to leave.

The window of the living-room was wide open, so that

he could hear the warbling of the thrush alternating with Fanny's orders to the servant: "Be sure and remember to have it ready at half-past six. First you will serve the wild duck. Oh! I must give you the table linen." Her voice rang out clear and happy among the noises of the kitchen and the twittering of the bird pluming himself in the sun. And he, knowing that their household had only two hours more to live, felt sick at heart in presence of those festal preparations.

He longed to go in, to tell her everything, on the spot, at one stroke; but he dreaded her shrieks, the horrible scene which the neighbors would overhear, and a scandal that would stir Upper and Lower Chaville to their depths. He knew that when she had thrown off all restraint, nothing had any effect upon her, and he adhered to his plan of taking her into the forest.

"Here I am, all ready."

She joyously took his arm, warning him to speak low and walk fast as they passed their neighbor's house, fearing that Olympe would want to accompany them and spoil their little party. Her mind was not at rest until they had crossed the track and turned to the left into the woods.

It was a bright, mild day, the sun's rays sifting through a silvery, floating mist which bathed the whole atmosphere, clung to the thickets, where some trees still displayed magpies' nests and tufts of mistletoe, at a great height among the few golden leaves clinging to the branches. They heard the cry of the bird, maintained

without a break, like the noise made by a file, and those blows of the beak on the wood which answer the wood-cutter's axe.

They walked slowly, keeping step on the rain-soaked ground. She was warm from having walked so fast; her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkled, and she stopped to take off the lace mantle, a gift from Rosa, which she had thrown over her head as she came out,—a fragile and costly relic of bygone splendors. The dress she wore, a poor black silk, ripped under the arms and at the waist, had been familiar to him for three years; and when she raised it, walking in front of him because of a puddle, he saw that the heels of her boots were badly worn.

How cheerfully she had endured that semi-poverty, without regret or lamentation, thinking solely of him, of his comfort, never happier than when she was rubbing against him, her hands clasped on his arm. And Jean, as he glanced at her, rejuvenated by that new supply of sunshine and of love, marveled at the never-failing energy of such a creature, at the wonderful power of forgetting and forgiving which enabled her to retain such a store of cheerful spirits and heedless gayety, after a life of passions, of disappointments and tears, all marked upon her face, but vanishing at the slightest effusion of merriment.

"It's a mushroom; I tell you it's a mushroom!"

She plunged into the underbrush up to her knees in the dead leaves, returned with disheveled hair and her dress torn by the brambles, and pointed out the little network at the foot of the mushroom which distinguishes the

genuine from the false variety. "You see, it has the *tulle!*" And she was triumphant.

He did not listen; he was thinking of other things, asking himself: "Is this the best time? Shall I?" But his courage failed him; she was laughing too heartily, or the place was not favorable; and he led her on and on like an assassin planning his crime.

He was on the point of making up his mind, when, at a bend in a path, some one appeared and disturbed their *tête-à-tête,*—the keeper of that district, Hochecorne, whom they sometimes met. A poor devil, who had lost, one after another, in the little house in the woods on the edge of the pond, which the state allotted him, two children and his wife, all by malignant fevers. At the time of the first death the doctors declared the house unhealthy, as being too near the water and its emanations; but, despite the certificates and reports, they had left him there two years, three years, long enough to see his whole family die with the exception of one little girl, with whom he had finally moved into a new house on the outskirts of the woods.

Hochecorne had a square Breton face, with bright, brave eyes, a forehead receding beneath his forage cap,—a typical specimen of fidelity to duty, of superstitious obedience to all orders; he had his rifle barrel over one shoulder and on the other the head of his sleeping child, whom he was carrying.

"How is she?" Fanny inquired, smiling at the little four-year-old girl, pale and shrunken with fever, who

awoke and opened her great eyes surrounded by pink circles. The keeper sighed.

"Not very well. I take her everywhere with me, but it's no use: she doesn't eat anything, she doesn't want anything; I can't help thinking it was too late when we changed the air, and that she had already caught the disease. She's so light—just see, madame, you'd think she was a leaf. One of these days she'll run away like the others! Good God!"

That "good God!" muttered in his moustache, was the whole of his revolt against the cruelty of departments and clerks.

"She is trembling; she seems to be cold."

"It's fever, madame."

"Wait a moment; we will warm her." She took the mantle that was hanging on her arm and wrapped the little one in it. "Yes, yes, let it stay; it shall be her bridal veil later."

The father smiled a heartbroken smile, and shaking the child's hand,—she had fallen asleep again and was ashen-hued like a little dead girl, in all that white,—he bade her thank the lady, then went his way with a "good God!" drowned by the cracking of the branches under his feet.

Fanny was no longer merry, but clung closely to him with all the timorous fondness of the woman whom her emotion, be it sad or joyous, draws nearer to the man she loves. Jean said to himself, "What a kind-hearted girl!" but without weakening in his resolve, on the contrary be-

coming more determined to put it in execution; for Irène's face rose before him on the sloping path on which they were entering, the memory of the radiant smile he had met in that path, which had taken his heart captive at once, even before he knew its enduring charm, the secret spring of intelligence and sweetness of character. He reflected that he had waited until the last moment, that it was Thursday. "Come, I must do it," and, spying a cross-road a short distance away, he mentally fixed upon that as the limit.

It was a clearing where the wood had recently been cut away, trees lying prostrate amid chips, fragments of bark, twigs, and charcoal kilns. A little farther on was the pond, from which a white vapor arose, and on the shore the little abandoned house, with its dilapidated roof, windows open and broken, the lazaretto of the Hochecornes. Beyond, the woods ascended toward Vélizy, a vast hillside of ruddy foliage of lofty trees, crowded closely together and melancholy to look upon. Suddenly he stopped.

"Suppose we rest a moment?"

They sat down on a long trunk lately felled, an old oak whose branches could be counted by the wounds of the axe. It was a warm corner, enlivened by a pallid reflection of the sun's rays, and by a perfume of belated violets.

"How nice it is here!" she said, letting her head fall languidly on his shoulder and seeking the place for a kiss in his neck. He drew back a little, took her hand. Thereupon she took alarm at the expression of his face, which had suddenly grown stern.

"What's the matter? What is it?"

"Bad news, my poor girl. You know Hédouin, who went away in my place." He spoke hesitatingly, in a hoarse voice, the sound of which astonished himself, but which gained in firmness toward the end of the story he had prepared beforehand. Hédouin had fallen sick on arriving at his post, and he was appointed by the department to replace him. He had concluded that that would be easier to say, less painful than the truth. She listened to him to the end, without interrupting him, her face a grayish pallor, her eyes staring into vacancy. "When are you going?" she asked, withdrawing her hand.

"Why, this evening, to-night." And in a false, whining voice he added, "I intend to pass twenty-four hours at Castelet, then sail from Marseilles."

"Enough, don't lie to me!" she cried with a savage explosion which brought her to her feet. "Don't lie to me any more; you don't know what you're doing. The truth is that you're going to be married. Your family's been working on you long enough. They're so afraid that I'll keep you, that I'll prevent you from going in search of the typhus or the yellow fever! At last they're satisfied. The young lady's to your taste, of course. And when I think how I fussed over the knot in your cravat that Thursday! What an idiot I was, eh?"

She laughed a ghastly, atrocious laugh, which distorted her features and showed a gap made on one side by the breaking—of recent occurrence, doubtless, for he had never before noticed it—of one of her lovely, pearly teeth

of which she was so proud; and the absence of that tooth in that clay-colored, wrinkled, distorted face caused Gaussin a horrible pang.

"Listen to me," he said, taking her arm and forcing her to sit close beside him. "It is true; I am going to be married. My father was set upon it, as you know so well; but what difference can that make to you, since I am to leave France?"

She released herself, preferring to keep her temper at the boiling point.

"And it was to tell me this that you made me walk a league through the woods! You said to yourself: 'At all events, they won't hear her if she cries.' But no: not an outcry, you see, not a tear. In the first place, I've had my fill of a pretty boy like you; you can go, I sha'n't be the one to call you back. Run away to the Indies with your wife, your little one, as they say where you come from. She must be a sweet creature, the little one, ugly as a gorilla, or else *enceinte* with a big waist, for you're as big a gull as those who chose her for you."

She no longer restrained herself, launching out upon a sea of insults and abominations, until she was able to do no more than falter in his face, tauntingly, as one shakes one's fist, "Coward! liar! coward!"

It was Jean's turn to listen to her without a word, without attempting to stop her. He liked her better so, insulting, degraded, Père Legrand's own daughter; the separation would be less cruel. Did she realize it? At all events, she suddenly ceased, fell at her lover's feet, her head and

breast foremost, with a great sob which shook her whole frame, and from which emerged a broken wail: "Forgive me! mercy! I love you; I have nobody but you. My love, my life, do not do this thing; do not leave me! What do you suppose will become of me?"

He began to yield to her emotion. Oh! that was what he had dreaded. The tears rose from her to him, and he threw back his head to keep them in his overflowing eyes, trying to calm her by stupid words, and by insisting upon that sensible argument, "Why, as long as I must leave France, anyway."

She sprang to her feet, crying in words which disclosed her whole hope,—

"Ah! but you would not have gone. I would have said to you, 'Wait, let me love you still.' Do you suppose that it happens twice to a man to be loved as I love you? You have time enough to marry, you are so young; but it will be all up with me before long. I shall be at the end of my strength, and then we shall part naturally."

He tried to rise; he had courage enough for that, and to say to her that all that she could do would be of no avail; but by clinging to him, dragging herself on her knees through the mud that still remained in that hollow spot, she forced him to resume his seat; and kneeling before him, twining her arms around him, with her lips and the clinging embrace of her eyes, her childlike caresses, patting that stern face with her hands, twining her fingers in his hair, she tried to kindle anew the cold embers of his love, she reminded him in whispers of their past happi-

ness, of their joyous Sunday afternoons. All that was nothing compared to the happiness she would give him hereafter.

And while she whispered in his ear words like these, great tears rolled down her face, distorted as it was by an expression of anguish and terror, and she struggled and shrieked in the voice that one hears in dreams: "Oh, it cannot be! tell me that it isn't true that you are going to leave me!" And more sobs and groans and calls for help, as if she saw a knife in his hand.

The executioner was hardly more courageous than the victim. He feared her wrath no more than her caresses, but he was defenseless against that despair, that braying which filled the woods and died away over the fever-laden, stagnant water whereon the sun lay, red and melancholy. He expected to suffer, but not so intensely as that; and it required all the dazzling splendor of the new love to enable him to resist the impulse to lift her with both hands and say to her, "I will stay; hush! I will stay."

For how long a time did they thus exhaust each other's strength? The sun was no longer aught but a red bar, constantly narrowing, on the horizon; the pond was of a slate-gray hue, and one would have said that its unhealthy vapor was invading the moor and the woods and the hillsides opposite. In the growing darkness he saw nothing but that pale face raised to his, that open mouth emitting a lament to which there was no end. A little later, when it was quite dark, her cries subsided. Then there was the

rushing sound of floods of tears, without end, one of those showers that follow the greatest fury of the tempest, and from time to time an "Oh!" deep and low, as if called forth by some horrible vision which she drove away and which constantly returned.

Then nothing at all. It was all over; the beast was dead. A cold north wind arose, rustled among the branches, bringing the echo of a distant clock striking the hour.

"Come, let us go; don't stay here."

He raised her gently, and felt that she was like wax in his hands, as submissive as a child and convulsed by heart-rending sobs. It seemed to him that she retained a certain dread, a certain respect, for the man who had shown himself so strong. She walked beside him, keeping step with him, but timidly, without taking his arm; and to see them thus, walking uncertainly in gloomy silence along the paths where the yellow reflection of the ground guided them, one would have said that they were a couple of peasants returning home exhausted after a long and fatiguing day in the open air.

As they came out of the woods a light appeared at Hochecorne's open door, and against it they saw the silhouettes of two men. "Is that you, Gaussin?" asked Hettéma, walking toward them with the keeper. They were beginning to be anxious because of their failure to return and of the groans they had heard in the woods. Hochecorne was just going to get his gun, to set out in search of them.

"Good-evening, monsieur, madame. The little one's much pleased with her shawl. I had to put it in the bed with her."

It was their last act in common, that almsgiving of a short time before; their hands had joined for the last time around the moribund's little body.

"Good-night, good-night, Père Hochecorne." And they hurried away, all three, toward the house, Hettéma still greatly puzzled concerning those noises which filled the woods. "They rose and fell and rose again; you'd have thought somebody was killing an animal of some sort. But didn't you hear anything?"

Neither of them replied.

At the corner of the Pavé des Gardes Jean hesitated.

"Stay to dinner," she whispered imploringly. "Your train has gone; you can take the nine o'clock."

He went into the house with them. What need he fear? Such a scene is not acted twice, and the least he could do was to give her that trifling consolation.

The living-room was warm, the lamp burned brightly, and the sound of their footsteps in the by-path had warned the servant, who was placing the soup on the table.

"Here you are at last!" said Olympe, already seated, her napkin under her short arms. She removed the lid of the soup-tureen, then suddenly paused with an exclamation,—

"*Mon Dieu!* my dear—"

It was Fanny, haggard of face, seemingly ten years

older, her eyes swollen and bloodshot, with mud on her dress and even in her hair, the terrified disarray of a prostitute after a chase by the police. She breathed heavily a moment, her poor inflamed eyes blinking in the light; and little by little the warm atmosphere of the little house, the bright and attractive table, evoked memories of the happy days and caused a new outburst of tears, amid which could be distinguished the words:

"He is going to leave me; he is going to be married."

Hettéma, his wife, and the peasant woman who was serving them looked at one another and at Gaussin. "At all events, let us dine," said the fat man, evidently in a passion; and the clashing of greedy spoons mingled with the sound of running water in the adjoining bedroom, where Fanny was sponging her face. When she returned, all blue with powder, in a white woolen *peignoir,* the Hettémas watched her with alarm, expecting some fresh outburst, and were greatly astonished to see her, without a word, attack the food greedily, like a shipwrecked sailor, and fill the hollow dug by her chagrin and the gulf made by her shrieks with whatever was within reach,—bread, cabbage, a wing of the wild duck, potatoes. She ate and ate.

The conversation was somewhat constrained at first, but gradually became more spontaneous; and as the Hettémas talked only upon commonplace, material topics, such as the method of making pancakes digest well with preserves, and whether hair or feathers were better to

sleep on, they arrived safely at the coffee, which the stout couple flavored with a little burned sugar, and sipped slowly with their elbows on the table.

It was a pleasure to see the trustful and placid glance exchanged by those two bulky crib and manger mates. They had no desire to part, not they. Jean surprised that glance, and in that familiar room, filled with souvenirs, with old habits crouching in every corner, the torpor of weariness, of digestion, of bodily comfort stole over him. Fanny, who was watching him closely, had softly approached his chair, rubbed against him, and passed her arm through his.

"Listen," he said suddenly. "Nine o'clock! adieu! I will write to you."

He sprang to his feet and was out-of-doors, across the street, feeling in the darkness for the latch of the gate at the entrance to the lane. Two arms were thrown about his waist: "Kiss me, at least."

He felt that he was enveloped in her dress, that he was impregnated with the perfume, the warmth, of that woman's embrace, intoxicated by that farewell kiss, which left in his mouth the taste of fever and of tears.

And she, feeling that he was weak, murmured, "Just a little while, only a little while."

A signal on the track. It was the train!

How had he the strength to tear himself free, to rush to the station whose lamps gleamed through the leafless branches? He was still overcome with amazement as he sat panting in a corner of the carriage, gazing out through

the window at the lighted windows of the little house and a white figure at the gate. "Adieu! adieu!" And that cry banished the speechless dread he had felt at that curve in the track of seeing his mistress in the place she occupied in his dream of death.

Putting out his head, he watched their little summer house recede and grow smaller and rise and fall in the inequalities of the ground, until it was no more than a wandering star. Suddenly he felt a prodigious joy and sense of relief. How freely he breathed, how lovely the whole valley of Meudon was, and those broad black hillsides ending far away in a twinkling triangle of innumerable lights, descending toward the Seine in regular lines! Irène was waiting for him there, and he was flying to her with all the speed of the train, with all his lover's eagerness, with all his impulsive yearning for a new and honorable life.

Paris! He called a cab to be driven to Place Vendôme. But under the gaslight he scrutinized his clothes, his shoes covered with mud, a thick, clogging mud, his whole past which still held him fast by burdensome and degrading bonds. Oh, no! not to-night. And he drove to his old lodging-house on Rue Jacob, where Le Fénat had taken a room for him near his own.

XIII

The next day Césaire, who had taken upon himself the delicate commission of going to Chaville to get his nephew's books and other property, to consummate the rupture by moving out of the house, returned very late, just as Gaussin was beginning to tire himself out with all sorts of wild and sinister conjectures. At last a cab with a rail around the top, heavy as a hearse, turned the corner of Rue Jacob, loaded with corded boxes and an enormous trunk which he recognized as his own, and his uncle entered, mysterious and heartbroken.

"I took plenty of time, in order to pick up everything at once and not have to go there again." He pointed to the boxes which two porters were placing in different parts of the room. "Your clothes and your linen are in this one, your papers and books there. Nothing is missing but your letters; she begged me to let her keep them, so that she could read them over again, could have something from you. I couldn't see that there was any danger in that. She's such a soft-hearted girl!"

He sat down on the trunk, breathing hard, sponging his forehead with his brown silk handkerchief, as large as a napkin. Jean dared not ask him for details, in what mood he had found her; the other furnished none for fear of making him sad. And they filled that painful silence,

pregnant with things unexpected, by remarks as to the sudden change in the weather, which had grown much colder since the preceding day, as to the depressing aspect of that bare, desert suburb of Paris, planted with factory chimneys, and with enormous cast-iron cylinders, used as storehouses by market-gardeners.

"Did she give you nothing for me, uncle?" Jean asked after a while.

"No; you need have no fear. She won't bother you; she has chosen her course with much determination and dignity."

Why did Jean detect in those few words a suggestion of blame, a rebuke for his harshness?

"I tell you," continued the uncle, "job for job, I prefer La Mornas's claws to that unhappy creature's despair."

"Did she cry much?"

"Oh, my dear boy— And so hard, so heartily, that I sobbed myself as I sat opposite her with no strength to—" He blew his nose and shook off his emotion with a shake of the head like an old goat. "However, what can you expect? It isn't your fault; you couldn't pass your whole life there. Things are settled quite as they should be; you leave her some money and her furniture. And now, on with the courting! Try to arrange your marriage in good season. Such affairs are too serious for me. The consul will have to take a hand in it. As for me, I can only deal with left-handed connections." He was suddenly seized by a fresh paroxysm of melancholy, and added, as he stood with his forehead against the window, looking out at the low

clouds from which the rain poured down upon the roofs,—

"I tell you, the world is growing dismal; in my day we used to part more cheerfully than this."

When Le Fénat had gone, accompanied by his elevating machine, Jean, deprived of that restless, talkative good-humor, had a long week to pass, an impression of emptiness and solitude, all the dark bewilderment of widowhood. In such cases, even without regret for a vanished passion, you seek for your double, you miss him; for the life together, the sharing of table and bed, create a network of invisible, subtle bonds, whose strength is disclosed only by the effort and the pain of breaking them. The influence of close association and habit is so marvelously penetrating that two persons who live the same life end by resembling each other.

His five years with Sapho had not as yet molded him to that extent; but his body retained the marks of the chain and felt its heavy, dragging weight. And just as it happened on several occasions that his steps turned instinctively toward Chaville when he left his office, so, in the morning, he would feel on the pillow beside him for the heavy masses of black hair, released from their comb, upon which his first kiss was wont to fall.

The evenings especially seemed interminable to him in those furnished lodgings which recalled the early days of their liaison, the presence of another mistress, reserved and silent, whose little card surrounded the mirror with an alcove perfume, and with the mystery of her name:

Fanny Legrand. Thereupon he would leave the house and try to tire himself out, to distract his thoughts with the music and glare of some petty theater, until old Bouchereau should give him the right to pass three evenings a week with his fiancée.

They had reached an understanding at last. Irène loved him, *Uncle* was content; the marriage was to take place early in April, at the end of the course of lectures. They had the three winter months to see each other, to become acquainted with each other, to desire each other, to make the fond and charming paraphrase of the first glance, which binds hearts together, and the first avowal, which causes unrest.

On the evening of his betrothal, Jean, returning home without the slightest inclination for sleep, felt an impulse to arrange his room so as to give it an orderly, hard-working appearance, obeying the natural instinct to make our life correspond with our thoughts. He put his table in place and his books, which he had not as yet unpacked, and which were tossed pell-mell into one of those packing-boxes made in haste, the Code between a pile of handkerchiefs and a gardening jacket. As he was arranging the books, a letter in his mistress's handwriting, with no envelope, fell from between the leaves of a Dictionary of Commercial Law, the book he consulted most frequently.

Fanny had intrusted it to the hazard of his future labors, distrusting the too short-lived emotion of Césaire, and thinking that she would gain her object more surely in that way. He determined not to open it at first, but

yielded at the very mild, very reasonable words with which it began, her agitation being evident in the trembling of the pen, the unevenness of the lines. She asked but one favor, a single one, that he would return to her from time to time. She would say nothing, she would reproach him with nothing, neither with his marriage nor with the separation, which she knew to be absolute and final. But if she could only see him!

"Remember that it was a terrible blow to me, and so sudden, so unexpected! I am just as if someone had died, or I had been burned out,—I don't know which way to turn. I weep, I expect you, I gaze at the place where my happiness used to lie. No one but you can accustom me to this new situation. As an act of charity, come and see me, so that I may feel not entirely alone. I am afraid of myself."

Those lamentations, that imploring summons, ran through the whole letter, with the constantly recurring refrain, "Come, come." He could fancy himself in the clearing in the heart of the woods, with Fanny at his feet, and that piteous face raised to his under the pale violet sky of evening, all haggard and soft with tears, that mouth opening in the darkness to cry out. It was that that haunted him all night, and disturbed his sleep, and not the intoxicating bliss he had brought from Place Vendôme. It was that worn, aged face that he constantly saw, despite all his efforts to place between it and him the face with pure outlines, the cheeks like a carnation in

flower, which the declaration of love tinged with a little red flush under the eyes.

That letter was dated a week before; for a whole week the unhappy creature had been awaiting a word or a visit, the encouragement she sought in resigning herself to her fate. But how did it happen that she had not written since? Perhaps she was ill; and his former fears returned. He thought that Hettéma might be able to give him news of her, and, relying upon the regularity of his habits, he went and waited for him in front of the Artillery headquarters.

The last stroke of ten was striking at Saint Thomas d'Aquin's when the stout man turned the corner of the little square, with his collar turned up and his pipe between his teeth, and holding the latter with both hands to warm his fingers. Jean watched him approaching in the distance, deeply moved by all the memories that the sight of him recalled; but Hettéma greeted him with a repugnance which he hardly tried to conceal.

"It's you, is it? Perhaps we haven't cursed you this week!—and we went into the country to lead a tranquil life."

As he stood in the doorway, finishing his pipe, he told him that on the preceding Sunday they had asked Fanny to dinner with the child, whose day it was to be at home, hoping to turn her mind from her miserable thoughts. The dinner passed off very cheerfully; she even sang something to them at dessert; then about ten o'clock they sepa-

rated, and the Hettémas were preparing to go comfortably to bed, when some one suddenly knocked on the shutters, and little Josaph cried in a terrified voice,—

"Come quick; mamma's trying to poison herself!"

Hettéma rushed to the house and arrived in time to take the phial of laudanum from her by force. He had had to fight, to throw her arms around her and hold her, and at the same time defend himself against the blows of her head and her comb, which she aimed at his face. In the struggle, the phial broke, the laudanum was spilled on everything, and there was no harm done beyond the spotting and perfuming of clothes with the poison. "But you can understand that such scenes, a whole drama of sensational news-items, don't suit peaceful folks like us. So it's decided, I've given my notice, and next month I move." He replaced his pipe in its case, and with a very affable adieu disappeared under the low arches of a small courtyard, leaving Gaussin thoroughly bewildered by what he had heard.

He pictured to himself the scene in that chamber which had been theirs, the terror of the little one calling for help, the rough struggle with the stout man, and he fancied that he could taste the bitter, sleep-producing flavor of the spilled laudanum. The horror clung to him all day, aggravated by the thought of the isolation that was soon to be her lot. When the Hettémas had gone who would restrain her hand when she made another attempt?

A letter arrived, and comforted him to some extent. Fanny thanked him for not being so hard-hearted as he

chose to appear, since he still took some interest in the poor abandoned wretch. "He told you, did he not? I tried to die; it was because I felt so lonely! I tried, but I could not; he stopped me, perhaps my hand trembled,—the fear of suffering, of becoming ugly. Oh, how did that little Doré have the courage? After the first shame of failure, it was a joy to think I could still write to you, love you at a distance, see you again; for I have not lost the hope that you will come once, as one goes to see an unhappy friend in the house of mourning, for pity's sake, simply for pity's sake."

Thereafter there came from Chaville every two or three days letters of varying length, a journal of sorrow which he had not the heart to send back, and which enlarged the sore spot in that tender heart made by a pity without love, no longer for the mistress, but for the fellow-creature suffering because of him.

One day her theme was the departure of her neighbors, those witnesses of her past happiness, who carried away so many souvenirs. All that she had now to remind her of it was the furniture, the walls of their little house, and the servant, poor uncivilized creature, as little interested in anything as the thrush, which huddled sadly in a corner of his cage, shivering with the cold.

Another day, when a pale sunbeam shone through her window, she awoke joyful in the firm conviction, "He will come to-day!" Why? for no reason, just an idea. She at once set about making the house attractive, and herself coquettish in her Sunday dress and with her hair arranged

as he liked it; and then she counted the trains from her window until evening, until the last trace of light had vanished, and listened for his footstep on the Pavé des Gardes. She must be mad!

Sometimes just a line: "It rains; it is dark; I am alone, and I am weeping for you." Or else she would content herself with placing in the envelope a poor little flower, all drenched and stiff with frost, the last flower from their little garden. That little flower, picked from under the snow, conveyed the idea of winter, of solitude and abandonment, better than all her lamentations; he could see the place, at the end of the path, and a woman's skirt brushing against the flower-beds, wet to the hem, sauntering to and fro in a solitary promenade.

The result of this pity, which tore his heart, was that he still lived with Fanny, notwithstanding the rupture. His mind was there, he pictured her to himself every hour of the day; but, by a singular freak of his memory, although it was only five or six weeks since their separation, and the most trivial details of their home were still present to his mind, from La Balue's cage, opposite a wooden cuckoo won at a country fair, to the branches of the walnut-tree which tapped at their dressing-room window in the lightest breeze, the woman herself no longer appeared to him distinctly. He saw her in a sort of mist, with a single detail of her face clearly marked and painful to see, —the deformed mouth, the smile punctured by the gap once filled by the missing tooth.

Thus withered and aged, what would become of the

poor creature by whose side he had slept so long? When the money he had left her was spent, where would she go, to what depths would she descend? And suddenly there rose before him in his memory the wretched street-walker he had met one night in an English tavern, dying of thirst before her slice of smoked salmon. She whose attentions, whose passionate and faithful affection he had so long accepted, would become like her! And that thought drove him to despair. But what could he do? Because he had had the misfortune to meet that woman, to live some time with her, was he doomed to keep her forever, to sacrifice his happiness to her? Why he, and not the others? In the name of what principle of justice?

Although forbidding himself to see her, he wrote to her; and his letters, purposely matter-of-fact and dry, afforded glimpses of his emotion beneath soothing and prudent counsels. He urged her to take Josaph away from the boarding-school, to keep him at home with her to divert her thoughts; but Fanny refused. What was the use of inflicting her sorrow, her discouragement, on that child? The little fellow had quite enough of it on Sunday, when he prowled from chair to chair, wandered from the living-room to the garden, conscious that some great misfortune had cast a blight upon the house, and not daring to ask any more questions about "Papa Jean," since she had told him, sobbing, that he had gone away and would not come back.

"All my papas go away, don't they?"

And that remark of the little foundling, repeated in a

heartrending letter, weighed heavily on Gaussin's heart. Soon the thought that she was at Chaville became so oppressive to him that he advised her to return to Paris, to see people. With her sad experience of men and separations, Fanny saw in that suggestion simply a shocking egotism, a hope to rid himself of her forever by one of those sudden fancies for which she had been famous; and she stated her views frankly:—

"You know what I said to you long ago. I will remain your wife in spite of everything, your faithful and loving wife. Our little house encompasses me with you, and I would not leave it for anything on earth. What should I do in Paris? I am disgusted with my past, which keeps you away from me; and then just think what temptation you would expose us to! Do you think you are very strong, pray? Then come, bad boy, once, only once."

He did not go; but one Sunday afternoon, when he was alone and working, he heard two little taps at his door. He was startled, recognizing her abrupt way of announcing her presence, as of yore. Fearing to find some order below, she had ascended the stairs at a breath, without asking any questions. He crept to the door, his footsteps muffled in the carpet, and heard her breathe through the crack,—

"Are you there, Jean?"

Oh, that humble, broken voice! Once again, not very loud, "Jean!" then a sighing groan, the rustling of a letter, and the caress and farewell of a kiss thrown through the door.

When she had descended the stairs, slowly, stair by

stair, as if expecting to be recalled, then, not before, did Jean pick up the letter and open it. Little Hochecorne had been buried that morning at the Children's Hospital. She had come with the father and some few persons from Chaville, and had been unable to resist going up to see him or to leave these lines written beforehand. "What did I tell you? If I lived in Paris, I should be on your stairs all the time. Adieu, my dear; I am going back to our home."

As he read, his eyes blurred with tears, he recalled a similar scene on Rue de l'Arcade, the grief of the discarded lover, the letter slipped under the door, and Fanny's heartless laughter. So she loved him better than he loved Irène! Or is it true that man, being more involved than woman in the conflicts of business and of life, has not, like her, the exclusiveness of love, the forgetfulness of and indifference to everything save her one absorbing passion?

That torment, those pangs of pity, were allayed only in Irène's presence. There only did his agony relax, melt away beneath the soft blue rays of her glances. He was conscious of naught save a great weariness, a temptation to lay his head on her shoulder, and to remain there without speaking or moving, under her wing.

"What is the matter?" she would say to him. "Aren't you happy?"

Yes, indeed, very happy. But why did his happiness consist of so much melancholy and weeping? At times he was tempted to tell her everything, as a kind friend who would understand his misery; without considering, poor

fool, the unhappiness that such confidences cause in untried hearts, the incurable wounds they may inflict upon the trustfulness of an attachment. Ah! if he could only have carried her away, have fled with her! he felt that that would be the end of his misery; but old Bouchereau would not advance by one hour the appointed time. "I am an old man; I am sick. I shall never see my child again, so don't rob me of these last days."

Beneath his stern exterior that great man was the kindest of men. Doomed irrevocably by the affection of the heart, whose progress he himself followed and noted, he talked about it with marvelous sang-froid, continued his lectures when he could hardly breathe, ausculted patients who were less ill than he. There was but one weak side to that boundless mind, and it was the one that betrayed the peasant origin of the native of Touraine: his respect for titles, for the nobility. And the remembrance of the little towers of Castelet and the venerable name of Armandy were not without their influence on his readiness to accept Jean as his niece's husband.

The marriage was to take place at Castelet, in order to avoid discommoding the poor mother, who sent every week to her future daughter an affectionate letter, dictated to Divonne or to one of the little saints of Bethany. And it was a soothing delight to him to talk with Irène about his family, to find Castelet on Place Vendôme, all his affections centered around his dear betrothed.

But he was dismayed to feel so old, so weary, compared with her, to see her take a childish pleasure in things

which no longer amused him, in the every-day joys of life, already discounted by him. For instance, the list that must be prepared of all that they would need to take to the distant consulate, furniture and coverings to be selected; and one evening he paused in the middle of it, with hesitating pen, dismayed to find his mind returning to his installation on Rue d'Amsterdam, and by the thought that he must inevitably begin anew all the pleasures that were exhausted and forever ended for him by those five years with another woman, in a burlesque of marriage and domesticity.

XIV

"Yes, my dear fellow, he died last night in Rosa's arms. I have just taken him to the taxidermist's."

De Potter, the musician, whom Jean met coming out of a shop on Rue du Bac, clung to him with an effusiveness hardly compatible with his features, the stern and impassive features of a man of business, and described to him the martyrdom of poor Bichito, slain by the Parisian winter, shriveled with cold, despite the wads of cotton-wool, the saucer of spirits of wine that had been kept lighted for two months under his little nest, as for children born before their time. Nothing could keep him from shivering; and the previous night, while they were all about him, one last shudder shook him from head to tail, and he died like a good Christian, thanks to the quantities of holy water which Mamma Pilar poured on his scaly skin, where life vanished in changing hues, in prismatic displays, saying, with uplifted eyes: "God forgive him!"

"I laugh about it, but my heart is heavy all the same; especially when I think of the grief of my poor Rosa, whom I left in tears. Luckily, Fanny was with her."

"Fanny?"

"Yes, we hadn't seen her for ages. She arrived this morning just in the midst of the drama, and the dear girl remained to comfort her friend." Heedless of the effect produced by his words, he added: "So it's all over between you? You aren't together now? Do you remember our con-

versation on the lake at Enghien? At all events, you profit by the lessons you receive." And a touch of envy could be detected in his approbation.

Gaussin knit his brow, feeling genuinely disgusted at the thought that Fanny had returned to Rosario; but he was angry with himself for such weakness, for, after all, he no longer had any sort of authority over her life or responsibility for it.

De Potter stopped in front of a house on Rue de Beaune, a very old street of the aristocratic Paris of an earlier day, into which they had turned. There it was that he lived, or was supposed to live, for the purpose of propriety and for the world at large; for in fact he passed his time on Avenue de Villiers or at Enghien, and made only brief visits to the conjugal domicile, so that his wife and child might not seem too entirely abandoned.

Jean was walking on, his mouth already open to say adieu, but the other held his hand in his long, hard keyboard crusher's hands, and, without a trace of embarrassment, like a man to whom his vice is no longer a matter for apology,—

"Pray do me a favor. Come upstairs with me. I was to dine with my wife to-day, but I really cannot leave my poor Rosa all alone with her despair. You will serve as a pretext for my going out and avoid a tiresome explanation."

The musician's study, a superb but cold bourgeois apartment on the second floor, smelt of the solitude of the room in which no work was done. Everything was too clean, without the slightest disorder, with none of the feverish activity which infects objects and furniture. Not

a book, not a paper on the table, which was occupied in solitary majesty by a huge bronze inkstand, without ink, and polished as if for exhibition in a shop-window; nor was there a sign of music on the old spinet-shaped piano, by which the early works were inspired. And a bust of white marble, the bust of a young woman with refined features and a sweet expression, pale in the fading light, made the fireless, draped fireplace even colder, and seemed to gaze sadly at the walls covered with beribboned golden wreaths, with medals, with commemorative frames, a glorious, pompous collection generously left to his wife by way of compensation, and cared for by her as the decorations of the tomb of her happiness.

They had hardly entered the study when the door opened again and Madame de Potter appeared.

"Is it you, Gustave?"

She thought that he was alone, and stopped abruptly at sight of the strange face, with evident disquietude. Refined and pretty, fashionably but quietly dressed, she seemed to have more character than her bust, the sweet expression of her face being replaced by a courageous and nervous determination. In society opinions were divided with regard to her. Some blamed her for enduring the advertised contempt of her husband, that second establishment known of all the world; others, on the contrary, admired her silent resignation. And she was generally considered a placid creature, loving her repose above everything, finding sufficient compensation for her widowhood in the caresses of a lovely child and the satisfaction of bearing the name of a great man.

But while the musician presented his companion and

muttered some falsehood or other to escape the dinner at home, Jean could see by the change that passed over that youthful face, by the fixity of that glance which no longer saw nor listened, as if absorbed by mental suffering, that a terrible sorrow was buried alive beneath that worldly exterior. She seemed to accept the fable, which she did not believe, and simply said in a gentle tone,—

"Raymond will cry; I promised him that we would dine by his bed."

"How is he?" asked De Potter, distraught, impatient.

"Better, but he still coughs. Aren't you coming to see him?"

He muttered something in his moustache, pretending to be looking around the room: "Not now—in a great hurry—appointment at the club at six o'clock." What he was most anxious to avoid was being left alone with her.

"Adieu, then," said the young woman, suddenly subdued, her features resuming their serenity, like a placid pool disturbed to its lowest depths by a stone. She bowed and disappeared.

"Let us be off!"

And De Potter, free once more, left the room, followed by Gaussin, who watched him as he went downstairs in front of him, stiff and correct in his long tight-fitting frock-coat of English cut,—that ill-omened lover, who was so deeply affected when he carried his mistress's chameleon to be stuffed, and left his house without kissing his sick child.

"All this, my dear fellow," said the musician, as if in answer to his friend's thought, "is the fault of those who made me marry. A genuine favor to me and to that poor

woman! What an insane idea to try to make a husband and father of me! I was Rosa's lover; I remained so, and I shall remain so until one of us dies. Does a man ever cut loose from a vice that seizes him just at the right moment and holds him fast? Take your own case,—are you sure that if Fanny had chosen—"

He hailed an empty cab which was passing and added, as he stepped in,—

"Apropos of Fanny, do you know the news? Flamant is pardoned; he has left Mazas. It was Déchelette's petition. Poor Déchelette! he did some good even after his death."

Gaussin stood still, with a mad longing to run, to overtake those wheels jolting rapidly down the dark street where the lamps were being lighted, and was astounded to find himself so deeply moved. "Flamant pardoned—left Mazas!" he repeated the words softly, seeing in them an explanation of Fanny's silence for several days, of her lamentations abruptly broken off, hushed under the caresses of a comforter; for the poor devil's first thought, when he was set free, must have been for her.

He remembered the affectionate letters from the prison, his mistress's obstinacy in defending him alone, when she held the others so cheap; and instead of congratulating himself upon a piece of good fortune which logically relieved him of all cause for anxiety, of all remorse, an indefinable heartache kept him awake and excited most of the night. Why? He no longer loved her; but he thought of his letters, still in that woman's hands, which she would read to the other, perhaps, and which—who knows?—she might some day, under an evil influence, make use of to disturb his repose, his happiness.

Whether it was false or genuine, or whether, unknown to him, it concealed a fear of another sort, that anxiety about his letters led him to determine upon an imprudent step, the visit to Chaville which he had always obstinately refused to make. But to whom could he intrust so delicate and confidential a mission? One morning in February he took the ten o'clock train, very calm in mind and heart, with no other fear than that of finding the house closed and the woman already vanished with her felon.

From the curve in the track, the sight of the open blinds and the curtains at the windows of the little house reassured him; and remembering his emotion when he watched the little light receding behind him in the darkness, he laughed at himself and the fickleness of his impressions. He was no longer the same man, and certainly he should not find the same woman. And yet only two months had passed. The woods by which the train sped had taken on no new leaves, retained the same leprous blotches as on the day of the rupture and of her shrieking to the echoes.

He alighted alone at the station in that cold, penetrating fog, took the narrow country road, slippery with the hard snow, passed under the railroad bridge, and met no one before he reached the Pavé des Gardes, where a man and boy appeared at the entrance to the path, followed by a railway porter pushing his truck laden with trunks.

The child, all muffled up in a comforter, his cap pulled over his ears, restrained an exclamation as they passed him.

"Why, it's Josaph!" he said to himself, a little surprised and saddened by the child's ingratitude; and as he turned

to look behind him, he met the eyes of the man who was leading the boy by the hand. That clever, intelligent face, blanched by confinement, those second-hand clothes purchased the day before, that light beard close to the chin, not having had time to grow since Mazas—Flamant, *parbleu!* And Josaph was his son!

It was a revelation in a flash of lightning. He saw and understood everything, from the letter in the casket wherein the handsome engraver commended to his mistress's care a child of his in the provinces, down to the little fellow's mysterious arrival and Hettéma's embarrassed manner at any mention of the adoption, and Fanny's significant glances at Olympe; for they were all in the plot to make him support the counterfeiter's son. Oh, what a jolly simpleton he was, and how they must have laughed at him! He felt a shudder of disgust with all that shameful past, a longing to leave it far, far behind him; but certain things disturbed him, which he wished to have cleared up. The man and the child had gone, why not she? And then his letters, he must have his letters, and leave nothing of his in that den of contamination and misery.

"Madame! Here is monsieur!"

"What monsieur?" artlessly inquired a voice from the bedroom.

"It is I."

He heard a little shriek, a hurried movement, then, "Wait, I am getting up; I am coming."

Still in bed, after twelve o'clock! Jean shrewdly suspected the reason; and while he awaited her coming in the

living-room, where the slightest objects were familiar to him, the whistle of a locomotive, the quivering bleat of a goat in a neighboring garden, the scattered dishes on the table carried him back to the mornings of other days, the hasty breakfast before he started for Paris.

Fanny came in and ran impulsively toward him, then suddenly checked herself in face of his frigid manner; and they stood for a second, surprised, hesitating, as if two people should meet, after one of these shattered intimacies, on opposite sides of a broken bridge, where the banks are far apart, and with a vast expanse of turbulent, all-engulfing waves between.

"Good-morning," she said in a low voice, without moving.

It seemed to her that he had changed, grown pale. He was amazed to find her so youthful, simply a little heavier, not so tall as he remembered her, but bathed in that peculiar radiance, that brilliancy of the complexion and the eyes, that softness as of a well-kept lawn which followed nights given over to pleasure. So the woman, the memory of whom gnawed his heart with pity, had remained in the woods, in the ravine strewn with dead leaves!

"People rise late in the country," he observed satirically.

She apologized for herself, talked about a sick headache, and, like him, used the impersonal forms of the verb, uncertain how to address him; then she said, in answer to the unspoken question conveyed by a glance at the remains of the breakfast, "It was the child; he breakfasted here this morning before going away."

"Going away? Where has he gone, pray?"

He affected supreme indifference with his lips, but the gleam in his eyes betrayed him.

"The father has reappeared," said Fanny; "he came and took him away."

"On his discharge from Mazas, eh?"

She was startled, but did not try to lie.

"Well, yes. I promised to do it; I did it. How many times I longed to tell you, but I dared not; I was afraid that you would turn him out, poor little fellow." And she added timidly, "You were so jealous!"

He laughed aloud in disdain. He jealous, and of that convict! Nonsense! And feeling that his wrath was rising, he cut himself short, and told her hurriedly why he had come. His letters! Why had she not given them to Césaire? That would have avoided an interview painful to them both.

"True," she said, still very gently, "but I will give them to you; they are in here."

He followed her into the bedroom, noticed the tumbled bed, the clothes hastily thrown over both pillows, inhaled the odor of cigarette smoke mingled with the perfumes of a woman's toilet, which he recognized, as he did the little mother-of-pearl casket on the table. And as the same thought came to both their minds, she said, opening the box: "There aren't very many of them; we shouldn't run any risk by putting them in the fire."

He said nothing, sorely perturbed, his mouth parched, hesitating to approach the rumpled bed, where she was turning over the letters for the last time, her head bent, the neck firm and white beneath the raised coils of her hair, and her figure, unconfined in the loose woollen gar-

ment she wore, yielding and flexible and somewhat ampler than of yore.

"There! They are all there."

Having taken the package and thrust it absently into his pocket, for the current of his thoughts had changed, Jean rejoined,—

"So he is taking his child away? Where are they going?"

"To Moravan, in his province, to hide himself and work at his engraving, which he will send to Paris under a false name."

"And you? Do you expect to remain here?"

She turned her eyes away to avoid his glance, stammering that it would be very dismal. So that she thought—perhaps she might go away soon—a short journey.

"To Moravan, of course? To keep house for him!" Thereupon he gave free rein to his jealous rage: "Why don't you say at once that you're going to join your thief, that you're going to live with him? You've wanted to do it long enough. Good! Go back to your kennel. Strumpet and counterfeiter go well together; I was very good to try and drag you out of that mire."

She maintained her mute immobility, a gleam of triumph stealing between her lowered lashes. And the more fiercely he stung her with his savage, insulting irony, the prouder she seemed, and the quiver at the corners of her mouth became more marked. Now he was talking about his happiness, about virtuous, youthful love, the only true love. Ah! what a soft pillow to lie upon was a virtuous woman's heart! Then, suddenly lowering his voice, as if he were ashamed,—

"I just met your Flamant; did he pass the night here?"

"Yes, it was late and snowing. I made up a bed for him on the couch."

"You lie! he slept there; one has only to use his eyes!"

"And what then?" she put her face close to his, her great gray eyes lighted with a lustful flame. "Did I know that you would come? And when I had lost you, what did I care for all the rest! I was alone, depressed, disgusted."

"And then the bouquet of the galleys! After living so long with an honest man! How you must have reveled in his society! Ah, you filthy creature! take this!"

She saw the blow coming without a movement to avoid it, received it full in the face, then, with a dull roar of pain, of joy, of victory, she leaped upon him and threw her arms about him.

"*M'ami, m'ami,* you love me still!"

An express train rushing by with a great uproar aroused him with a start toward evening; as he lay for some moments with his eyes open, unable to identify himself, alone in the depths of that great bed. Much snow had fallen during the afternoon. In a silence as profound as that of the desert, he could hear it melting, running down the walls and the windows, dripping in the gutters on the roof, and, now and then, sputtering on the coke fire on the hearth.

Where was he? What was he doing there? Gradually, in the light reflected from the little garden, the room appeared before him, all white, lighted from below, with Fanny's great portrait hanging opposite him; and he recalled the circumstances of his downfall without the slightest astonishment. Immediately on entering that

room, standing by that bed, he had felt that he was recaptured, lost; old associations drew him on like a yawning chasm, and he said to himself, "If I fall now, it will be irrevocably and forever." It was done; and beneath the feeling of melancholy and disgust at his cowardice, there was a sort of relief in the thought that he would never again emerge from that mire, the pitiable satisfaction of the wounded man who while the blood gushes from his wound, throws himself upon a dung-hill to die, and, weary of suffering, of struggling, all his veins being open, buries himself blissfully in the soft and fetid warmth.

What remained for him to do now was ghastly but very simple. Could he return to Irène after such treachery, and run the risk of a household *à la de Potter*? Low as he had fallen, he had not yet reached that point. He would write to Bouchereau, the great physiologist who was the first to study and describe diseases of the will, and lay before him a horrible case, the story of his life from his first meeting with that woman, when she had laid her hand upon his arm, down to the day when, believing that he was saved, in the midst of his happiness, of his intoxicating bliss, she seized him again by the magic of the past, that horrible past in which love occupied so small a place, simply cowardly habit and the vice that had entered into his bones.

The door opened. Fanny stole softly into the room in order not to awaken him. Between his lowered eyelids he watched her, active and strong, rejuvenated, standing at the fire warming her feet, which were wet through with the snow in the garden, and from time to time turning to look at him with the little smile her face had worn in the

morning during the quarrel. She took the package of Maryland, which was in its usual place, rolled a cigarette and was going out, but he called her back.

"Aren't you asleep?"

"No. Sit down here and let us talk."

She sat on the edge of the bed, a little surprised by his gravity.

"Fanny, we must go away."

She thought at first that he was joking, to test her. But the very precise details that he gave her soon undeceived her. There was a vacant post, that at Arica; he would ask for it. It was a matter of a fortnight, just time enough to get their trunks ready.

"And your marriage?"

"Not another word on that subject. What I have done is irreparable. I see plainly enough that that is all over; I cannot tear myself away from you."

"Poor *bébé!*" she said, with melancholy gentleness, not unmixed with contempt. Then, after two or three puffs,—

"Is this place you speak of very far away?"

"Arica? very far, in Peru. Flamant won't be able to join you there," he added in a whisper.

She sat thoughtful and mysterious in her cloud of tobacco smoke. He still held her hand, patted her bare arm, and, lulled by the dripping of the water all about the house, he closed his eyes and sank gently into the mire.

XV

Nervous, quivering, with steam up, already under way in fancy like all those who are preparing for departure, Gaussin has been two days at Marseilles, where Fanny is to join him and sail with him. Everything is ready, the staterooms taken, two in the first cabin, for the vice-consul at Arica traveling with his sister-in-law; and here he is pacing up and down the worn floor of his hotel chamber, in the twofold feverish expectation of his mistress and the time for sailing.

He must needs walk and work off his excitement where he is, as he dares not go out. The street embarrasses him like a criminal, a deserter,—the bustling, swarming Marseilles street, where, at every corner, it seems to him that his father old Bouchereau will appear, lay their hands on his shoulder, to recapture him and take him back.

He keeps himself in seclusion and eats in his room, not even going down to the *table d'hôte,* reads without fixing his eyes on the page, throws himself on his bed, diverting his vague siestas with the *Shipwreck of La Perouse* and the *Death of Captain Cook,* which adorn the wall, covered with fly-specks, and leans for hours at a time on the rotten wooden balcony, sheltered by a yellow shade as profusely patched as the sail of a fishing boat.

His hotel, the "Hôtel du Jeune Anacharsis,"—the name, which he chanced to see in Le Bottin, tempted him when he appointed a rendezvous with Fanny,—was

an old inn, by no means luxurious, not even very clean, but looking on the harbor with an odor of the sea and of travel. Under his windows, parrots, cockatoos, canaries, with their sweet interminable chirping, the whole open-air display of a dealer in birds, whose cages, piled one upon another, salute the dawn with the murmurs of a virgin forest, overshadowed and drowned as the day advances by the noisy labors of the port, regulated by the great bell of Notre-Dame de la Garde.

There is a confusion of oaths in all tongues, of the cries of boatmen and porters and dealers in shells, between the blows of the hammer in the refitting docks, the groaning of the cranes, the sonorous blows of the arms of the great levers on the pavement, ship's bells, whistles, the rhythmic music of pumps and capstans, water pouring from holes, escaping steam,—all this uproar, increased twofold and repeated by the echoing surface of the sea near at hand, from which at intervals arises the hoarse roar, the marine monster's breath, of a great transatlantic liner steaming out to sea.

And the odors, too, evoke distant countries, wharves on which the sun beats down more fiercely than on this; the cargoes of sandal-wood and logwood being discharged, the lemons, oranges, pistachio nuts, figs, whose penetrating odor ascends in clouds of exotic dust in an atmosphere saturated with brackish water, burned herbs, and the greasy smoke of the *Cookhouses*.

At nightfall these noises diminish, these dense substances in the air fall to the ground and evaporate; and while Jean, reassured by the darkness, raises his shade and looks down upon the black sleeping harbor, beneath the

interlacing network of masts and yards and bowsprits, when the silence is broken only by the splashing of an oar or the distant barking of a ship's dog, out at sea, far out at sea, the revolving light of Planier casts a long red or white flame which rends the darkness, shows in the twinkling of an eye the shadow of islands, forts and cliffs. And that luminous glance, guiding myriads of lives over the waves, likewise suggests travel, invites him and beckons to him, summons him in the voice of the wind, the long swell of the open sea, and the hoarse clamor of a steamboat always gasping and blowing somewhere in the roadstead.

Twenty-four hours more to wait; Fanny is not to join him until Sunday. Those three days of waiting at the rendezvous he expected to pass with his family, to devote them to the loved ones whom he will not see again for several years, whom he will never see again, perhaps; but on the evening of his arrival at Castelet, when his father learning that the marriage was broken off and guessed the reason, a violent, terrible explanation had taken place.

What manner of creatures are we, in God's name, what are our tenderest affections, the affections nearest our heart, that a fit of passion between two persons of the same flesh and blood should twist and tear out and carry away the natural sentiments, whose roots are so deep and strong, with the blind irresistible violence of one of those typhoons of the China seas which the bravest sailors do not dare to remember, but say, with pallid cheeks, "Let us not talk about that."

He will never talk about it, but he will remember all

his life that terrible scene on the terrace at Castelet where his happy childhood was passed, facing that placid, beautiful landscape, those pines, those myrtles, those cypresses, which stood quivering in serried ranks around that paternal curse. He will always have before his eyes that tall old man, with his trembling, convulsed features, striding toward him with that expression of hatred about his mouth, with that look of hatred in his eyes, uttering the words one does not forgive, driving him from the house and from the ranks of men of honor: "Begone! go with your harlot; you are dead to us!" And the little twins, crying and dragging themselves on their knees to the door, imploring forgiveness for the big brother, and Divonne's pale face, without a glance, without a farewell word, while, at the window above, the invalid's sweet, anxious face asked the explanation of all that noise, and why her Jean went away so hurriedly and without kissing her.

The thought that he had not kissed his mother made him turn back half-way to Avignon; he left Césaire with the carriage on the outskirts of the farm, took the cross-road, and entered Castelet by the vineyard like a thief. It was a dark night; his feet sank in the dead vines, and he actually ended by being unable to tell where he was, seeking his house in the darkness, already a stranger at home. The vague reflection of the rough-cast walls guided him at last; but the door was fastened, and there was no light in any window. Should he ring or call? He dared not, through fear of his father. He walked around the house two or three times, hoping to make his way in through some insecurely fastened shutter. But Divonne's lantern had gone the rounds, as it did every evening; and after

gazing long at his mother's chamber and bidding farewell with all his heart to the home of his childhood, which, too, repulsed him, he fled at last in despair, with a burden of remorse which gave him no rest.

Ordinarily, when young men set out for a prolonged absence, on voyages subjected to the dangerous hazards of the sea and the wind, their relatives and friends prolong their leave-taking until the final embarkation; they pass the last day together, they inspect the boat and the traveler's stateroom, in order to follow him the better on his journey. Several times each day Jean sees such affectionate escorts pass his hotel, sometimes numerous and noisy; but he is especially touched by a family party on the floor below him. An old man and an old woman, country people in comfortable circumstances, in broadcloth coat and yellow Cambrai linen dress, have come to see their son off, to be with him until the sailing of the packet; and he can see them, all three, leaning out of their window, idling away the hours of waiting, holding one another's arms, the sailor in the middle, very close together. They do not speak; they embrace.

As Jean watches them, he thinks what a happy departure he might have had. His father, his little sisters, and, resting her soft trembling hand on his arm, she whose eager mind and adventurous soul all the white sails in the offing would irresistibly attract. Vain regrets! The crime is consummated; his destiny is on the rails; he has only to go away and to forget.

How slow and cruel the hours of the last night seemed to him! He tossed and turned in his hard hotel bed,

watched for the daylight to appear on the windows, with the gradual shading from black to gray, followed by the whiteness of dawn, which the lighthouse still punctured with a red spark, soon extinguished by the rising sun.

Not until then did he fall asleep; and he was abruptly awakened by a flood of light streaming into his room, by the confused cries from the bird-dealer's cages blending with the innumerable chimes of Sunday in Marseilles echoing over the empty wharves, where all the engines are at rest and flags flying at the mastheads. Ten o'clock already! and the express from Paris arrives at noon. He dresses in haste to go and meet his mistress; they will breakfast looking out upon the sea, then they will carry the luggage on board, and at five o'clock the signal for departure.

A wonderfully lovely day, a deep blue sky with sea-gulls flying hither and thither like white specks, the sea of a still deeper, mineral blue, whereon sails, smoke, everything is visible,—everything glistens and dances; and, like the natural outpouring of those sunlit banks encompassed by the transparent atmosphere and water, harps are playing beneath the hotel windows, an Italian air, divinely sweet, but with a dragging movement of the fingers across the chords that excites the nerves painfully. It is more than music, it is a winged translation of the joyous humor of the South, the plenitude of life and love swollen even to tears. And the memory of Irène steals into the melody, quivering and weeping. How far away it is! What a fair, lost country, what never-ending regret for opportunities vanished beyond recall!

Let us be off!

On the threshold, as he is going out, Jean meets a waiter: "A letter for Monsieur le Consul. It arrived this morning, but Monsieur le Consul was so sound asleep!" Travelers of distinction are rare at the Hôtel du Jeune Anacharsis, so the worthy Marseilles parade the title of their guest at every opportunity. Who can have written to him? No one knows his address except Fanny. And as he looks more closely at the envelope, he shudders, he understands.

"No, I will not go! it is too great a piece of folly, to which I do not feel equal. For such undertakings, my poor fellow, one must have youth, which I no longer have, or a blind, mad passion, which neither of us has. Five years ago, in the happy days, at a sign from you, I would have followed you to the ends of the earth, for you cannot deny that I loved you passionately. I gave you all I had; and when it was necessary to tear myself away from you I suffered as I never suffered for any man. But such a love exhausts one, you see. To feel that you were so handsome, so young, to be always trembling because of having so many things to defend! Now I can do no more; you have made my life too hard, have made me suffer too much, and I am at the end of my strength.

"Under these conditions the prospects of that long journey, of changing my whole life, terrifies me. Just think how fond I am of keeping still, and that I have never been farther than Saint-Germain! And then women grow old too quickly in the sun, and before you are thirty I shall be as yellow and wrinkled as Mamma Pilar; then is the time that you would be angry with me for your sacrifice, and poor Fanny would pay for everybody else's sins.

Do you know, there is a country in the East—I read about it in one of your numbers of *Le Tour du Monde*—where, when a woman deceives her husband, they fasten her alive to a cat and put them in the reeking skin of a beast just flayed, then toss the bag on the beach, howling and plunging about in the hot sun. The woman screeches, the cat scratches, while the skin dries up and contracts around that horrible struggle between prisoners, until the last death rattle, the last convulsive movement of the bag. That is the sort of torture that would be in store for us if we were together."

He paused a moment, crushed, stupefied. As far as he could see, the blue waves sparkled in the sun. *Addio!* sang the harps, reinforced by a voice as ardent and passionate as they. *Addio!* And the utter nothingness of his shipwrecked, ruined life, all débris and tears, appeared before him, the field mown, the crops harvested beyond recall, and all for that woman who was slipping from his grasp!

"I ought to have told you this sooner, but I dared not, seeing that you were so worked up, so determined. Your excitement influenced me; and then my woman's vanity, my very natural pride in having won you back after the rupture. But, deep down in my heart, I felt that I was no longer equal to it, that something had broken and it was all over. What can you expect? after such paroxysms! And do not imagine that it is on account of poor Flamant. For him, as for you and everybody else, it is all over, my heart is dead; but there is that child, whom I cannot do with-

out, and who leads me back to his father, poor man, who ruined himself for love of me, and came back to me from Mazas as ardent and loving as at our first meeting. Just fancy that when we met again, he passed the whole night weeping on my shoulder; so you see there was no reason for you to lose your head about him.

"As I have told you, my dear child, I have loved too much; I am worn out. At the present time, I need to have some one love me, coddle me, admire me, and rock me to sleep. Flamant will be at my feet and will never see any wrinkles or gray hairs; and if he marries me, as he intends to do, I shall be doing him a favor. Compare. Above all things, no nonsense. I have taken precautions to prevent your finding me. From the little railway café where I am writing to you, I can see through the trees the house where we passed such happy and such painful moments, and the sign flapping against the door, awaiting new tenants. You are free; you will never hear of me again. Adieu! one kiss, the last in your neck—*m'ami.*"

THE END